JUNE 30, 2003

Bob Hope, Prisoner of War

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The Nation.

IN DEFENSE OF THE *TIMES*
Eric Alterman

WMD DECEIT
Jonathan Schell

HILLARY & MARTHA
Katha Pollitt

DEFLATION

by WILLIAM GREIDER

It threatens the U.S.—and the world

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LETTERS

SHIITES, SUNNIS & IVINS

Washington, DC

■ I was unpleasantly surprised to see the normally sagacious Molly Ivins branding Tom DeLay and his Texan confreres as "Shiite Republicans," meaning (according to Ivins) "they don't compromise, they don't deal, they don't look for the middle way" ["Tales of the Texas Border," June 9]. While DeLay deserves all manner of epithets, Ivins's word choice, however humorous in intent, reproduces the false equation in our media ether between "Shiite" and "fundamentalist" or "extremist."

Shiism is one of two main doctrinal branches within Islam. Its split with Sunnism relates to a dispute over who was the proper successor to Mohammed, not to differing degrees of theological rigidity or piety. For centuries, the large majority of Shiites pursued a political quietism that we can only wish Tom the Bug Killer would adopt. Ayatollah Khomeini reversed the quietist tendency with his advocacy of clerical rule, but that doctrine was then, and remains, highly contested among Shiite clergy and laypeople. Today it is in decline. To tar Shiites everywhere with this brush is like saying that Methodists everywhere share the ideas of Bush and Cheney.

The United States is now occupying one majority-Shiite country, and the likes of DeLay would like it to attack another. Especially now, *The Nation* should help to refine, not coarsen, American discourse about Shiism and Islam.

CHRIS TOENSING, *editor*
Middle East Report

IVINS REPLIES

Austin, Tex.

■ OK, OK, my cultural horizons from Texas are a little limited. I was looking for the Islamic equivalent of "foot-washing Baptist." If the Sunnis are the Methodists and the Shiites are the Presbyterians, what do you think: Can we call them Wahhabi Republicans?

No offense intended, MOLLY IVINS

THAT 'HATE AMERICA' EGGHEAD!

Philadelphia

■ Here are three quotations for your readers:

Columbia Daily Spectator, November 7, 2002, Eric Foner: "This doctrine of what they [i.e., the Bush Administration leaders] call preemption or preventive war is a complete repudiation of the whole notion of international law, of the international rule of law. It takes us back to the notion of the rule of the jungle. It's a throwback to the days before the United Nations, before notions of international standards of conduct. This is exactly the same argument that the Japanese used in attacking Pearl Harbor. This is exactly the justification they gave for the attack on Pearl Harbor. It was a preemptive strike against the United States because the United States was becoming more and more threatening to Japan."

New York Post, November 12, 2002, my column, titled "Profs Who Hate America": "Eric Foner, professor of *19-century American history* at Columbia University, states that a preemptive war against Iraq 'takes us back to the notion of the rule of the jungle' and deems this 'exactly the same argument' the Japanese used to justify the attack on Pearl Harbor."

The Nation, June 2, Eric Foner's editorial, "Dare Call It Treason": "Daniel Pipes said in his syndicated newspaper column that I 'hate America' because I noted that Japan invoked the idea of pre-emptive war to justify its attack on Pearl Harbor."

No, Professor Foner, that is not what I wrote. You hate America not because of your comments on Japanese actions but because you accuse the US government of acting according to "the rule of the jungle" and because you see it as comparable to the Hideki Tojo dictatorship. Your misquoting me on this simple matter points out the incompetence (or duplicity) of your research. It is one more mark of shame you bring to Columbia University. DANIEL PIPES

FONER REPLIES

New York City

■ Not satisfied with his syndicated column, website and frequent television appearances, Daniel Pipes now subjects *Nation* readers to an example of his poisonous attacks on those he considers disloyal. But readers will recognize that to Pipes, "hating" America means disagreeing with the policies of the Bush Administration.

Let me suggest that Pipes add the following to his database of quotations. It was written by Henry Steele Commager in 1947, another time when self-appointed arbiters of patriotism used

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Cover design by Open; illustrations by Katrin Wiese, Edward Sorel, Ryan Inzana

EDITORIALS

Taking Back America

As America's jobless rate hit a nine-year high and after-the-fact analyses of the Republican tax plan revealed that the Bush Administration and its allies in Congress had denied child tax credits to low-income families, the conservative Democratic Leadership Council was furiously dispatching memos warning Democrats not to get too aggressive about confronting the Administration. But at the June 4–6 Campaign for America's Future conference in Washington, where the people who form the party's heart and soul gathered to forge a Take Back America strategy for the 2004 presidential election, the DLC's insistence that Democrats stick to the electorally disastrous Republican-lite mode of 2002 found no takers. Instead, those assembled made it clear they prefer the tactics urged on them by journalist Bill Moyers, who called for getting over any fears of being "labeled class warriors in a war the other side started and is winning."

"Those folks at the DLC are wrong," declared Democratic presidential contender Howard Dean to the cheers of more than 1,000 labor, civil rights, civil liberties and peace activists from across the country. "The way to get elected...is not to be like the Republicans but to stand up and fight." Dean got no disagreement from the other Democratic contenders who—with the exception of no-shows Joe Lieberman, a DLC acolyte, and Senator Bob Graham—stumbled over one another in a rush to take up the mantle of progressive populism.

While Senator John Edwards continued to dust off themes from Bill Clinton's 1992 Putting People First campaign, and Senator John Kerry struggled to get the right inflection on one-liners such as how the Administration is "opening firehouses in Baghdad and closing firehouses in New York," Congressional Progressive Caucus co-chair Dennis Kucinich was the candidate who most successfully channeled the spirit of William Jennings Bryan. Kucinich, who drew nine standing ovations, gave a speech that promised to withdraw the United States from the economically devastating North American Free Trade Agreement. He also said he'd shift dollars from a bloated Pentagon budget to healthcare and education, and he dismissed proposals to privatize Social Security with, "That money belongs to Main Street, not Wall Street."

As sound as the rhetoric of the presidential contenders was, however, an even more encouraging Democratic sign of life came from an unexpected corner, Capitol Hill, where the party's Congressional leaders were dealt a winning hand and played it. Leading the successful charge to restore the tax credit for 12 million low-income children, Senate minority leader Tom Daschle declared, "Instead of leaving no child behind, the Administration's tax plan left 12 million children behind." The popular appeal of that message was not lost on Senate Republicans, who voted with Democrats to restore the provision. And even as House majority leader Tom DeLay rejected the Senate approach, insisting that any restoration of the tax credit would have to be part of another big tax cut bill, minority leader Nancy Pelosi promised "to make this issue too hot for the Republicans to handle."

That's a smart strategy for this Congress, and for the coming presidential election. But it will work only if Democrats make more issues—including privatization of Medicare, the healthcare crisis and assaults on pension guarantees—too hot to handle. Bush has made it clear where his loyalties lie in the class war the GOP started. If Democrats get into the fight, they'll find they have not just the message but the troops—millions of newly inspired voters—they'll need to win.

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COMMENT

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The Nation (ISSN 0027-8378) is published weekly (except for the second week in January, and biweekly the fourth week of July through the third week of September) by The Nation Company, L.P. © 2003 in the U.S.A. by The Nation Company, L.P., 33 Irving Place, New York, NY 10003. (212) 209-5400. Washington Bureau: Suite 308, 110 Maryland Avenue N.E., Washington, DC 20002. (202) 546-2239. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and at additional mailing offices. International Telex: 667 155 NATION. Subscription orders, changes of address and all subscription inquiries: The Nation, PO Box 55149, Boulder, CO 80322-5149, or call 1-800-333-8536. **When ordering a subscription, please allow 4-6 weeks for receipt of your first issue and for all subscription transactions.** Back issues $4 prepaid ($6 foreign) from: The Nation, 33 Irving Place, New York, NY 10003. The Nation is available on microfilm from: University Microfilms, 300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106. Member, Audit Bureau of Circulations. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to The Nation, PO Box 55149, Boulder, CO 80322-5149. This issue went to press on June 11. Printed in U.S.A. on recycled paper.

INTERNET: Selections from The Nation are available on Thursday by 12 midnight Eastern Time, at www.thenation.com.

The 'Intelligence' Game

As quixotic searches for "weapons of mass destruction" in Iraq continue to yield little more than chagrin, the Washington establishment is growing restive. Yet it's hard to say what's more bemusing about the burgeoning *Sturm und Drang* along the Potomac: The pointed questions about WMD-related "intelligence" cited by the Bush Administration to justify its invasion of Iraq or the "shocked, shocked" tones in which some are asking the questions.

Anyone familiar with the intelligence game knows how susceptible any intelligence—raw reports and intercepts, finished analyses, white papers, national intelligence estimates—is to potential manipulation or subversion. You didn't even need a specially compartmented top-secret clearance to divine what was going on in the case. By simply reading the papers and connecting some slightly arcane open-source dots last year, it was clear that the Rumsfeld/Cheney axis was having its way with the CIA.

None of this should come as a surprise. It was a well-documented fact long before 9/11 that the neoconservative clique the Defense Secretary and Vice President hail from has a long history of using force and subterfuge to make intelligence say—implicitly or explicitly—what's ideologically desired.

To be fair, this isn't something unique to one strain of the polity, nor does it mean career analysts warm to the task of cooking the books. As the distinguished intelligence writer Thomas Powers noted in a 1982 *Atlantic Monthly* essay, "Dishonesty in the intelligence business is not personal but institutional," with the political needs of Washington inevitably leading the CIA to compromise its findings. And to illustrate that point, Powers cited a case study that bears more than a passing resemblance to the current situation:

> The CIA can drag its feet for only so long. For example, at the height of the controversy over the SS-9—the Soviet missile, first detected in the mid-1960s, that many suspected to be a first-strike weapon—the CIA was more or less directly ordered by Melvin Laird to remove a paragraph from the Soviet NIE [National Intelligence Estimate] that said that the Russians were almost certainly not planning to build a first-strike capability. Power, not argument, carried the day. Laird was the secretary of defense, and he simply *would not accept* the offending paragraph. This may not be what scientists call objectivity, but it is the way things work.

There are, of course, other ways to get the CIA imprimatur without being quite so interventionist. On October 7, 2002, Director of Central Intelligence George Tenet sent a letter to Congress that many viewed as a rebuke to George W. Bush's relentless characterization of Saddam Hussein as an imminent threat to America. Conventional wisdom held that the President had problems based on the CIA's assessment that Iraqi WMD operations were not on a hairtrigger but were only likely in the event of a US attack on Iraq.

However, almost every current or retired intelligence officer I spoke with that week had a radically different view: Tenet's letter was, in fact, a masterpiece of equivocation, a piece of politicized intelligence whose genius lay in a judicious use of language allowing for either pro- or antiwar forces to cite it with approval. While

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it did indeed say, "Baghdad for now appears to be drawing a line short of conducting terrorist attacks with conventional or CBW [weapons] against the United States," the presence of the words "for now" between "Baghdad" and the somewhat opaque "appears" gave the assessment an urgent, ominous quality easy for any hawk to seize on.

Tenet's comments on WMD ties between Saddam and Al Qaeda—most recently called into question by a June 9 *New York Times* story quoting two top Al Qaeda officials now in US custody as saying no such ties exist—also cut both ways. "This is the price George, who's a Democrat, pays if he wants to keep his job in this Administration, especially post-9/11," a veteran intelligence officer opined to me. "It's language ready-made for a stump speech: 'We have credible reporting that Al Qaeda leaders sought contacts in Iraq who could help them acquire WMD capabilities. The reporting also stated that Iraq has provided training to Al Qaeda members in areas of poisons and gases and making conventional bombs.'" As the officer noted, "credible isn't the same as true. Can it be corroborated? What's the context for it? Does this automatically mean Saddam's in cahoots with Al Qaeda for WMD attacks, or could it be that Saddam's keeping friends close and enemies closer? And if there's 'credible information indicating Iraq and Al Qaeda have discussed safe haven and reciprocal nonaggression,' things like 'safe haven' and 'nonaggression' sound pretty different than active cooperation. Which is it?"

Also worth noting, the same spooks told me, were fishy shifts in ongoing CIA reporting on Iraq's nuclear, chemical, biological and missile capabilities. I haven't plowed through all the unclassified reports, but National Security Archive fellow John Prados has, and his 5,000-word report in the May/June *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* (www.thebulletin.org/issues/2003/mj03/mj03prados.html) makes for a highly interesting and informative read. Titled "A necessary war? Not according to UN monitors—or to US intelligence, which has watched the situation even more carefully," Prados ultimately concludes: "It is fair to suspect that CIA analysts did not approve of the cast being given to their reporting. Conversely, Defense Secretary Rumsfeld had little real need to create his own in-house intelligence staff to furnish threat information on Iraq—George Tenet's CIA had already been hounded into doing just that. The Iraqi threat was nothing like the Soviet one, but intelligence had been manipulated just the same." The more things change, the more they stay the same... JASON VEST

Jason Vest writes on national security affairs for The Nation.

Bumps in the Road Map

The Bush Administration's carefully stage-managed June 4 Aqaba summit could not hide the serious structural impediments to a resolution of the Israel-Palestine conflict. Indeed, the ludicrous attention to the details of the photo-op—the specially built bridge over King Abdullah's pool, enabling the leaders to walk side by side over water, and the outdoor air-conditioning that allowed them to wear business suits without sweating in the fierce heat—only underscored the artificiality of the meeting and the lack of substantive agreement on either procedure or goals.

From the Israeli perspective, any agreement that even approaches the "viable Palestinian state" called for in the road map will bring about a direct, and perhaps violent, confrontation with the vast settlement infrastructure and constituency that seems to exert a stranglehold over the Israeli political system. The tens of thousands who protested in Jerusalem on the day of the summit meeting, and the strong presence of settler representatives not only in the Knesset but in Ariel Sharon's Cabinet, are clear evidence of their political clout.

As for the Palestinians, Abu Mazen's denunciation of the armed intifada may have been welcomed in Tel Aviv and Washington, but to Palestinians it was evidence that he was Israel's and Washington's man, not theirs. That his speech was revised and approved by the White House only strengthened that feeling. As long as Israel continues its policy of closures, curfews, assassinations and mass detentions, there will be widespread support for armed resistance, and Abu Mazen and his security chief, Muhammad Dahlan, will almost certainly be powerless to stamp it out. The recent attack that killed Israeli soldiers at the Erez crossing in Gaza, a coordinated operation involving Hamas, Islamic Jihad and the Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigades (grassroots units of Abu Mazen and Yasir Arafat's Fatah), was a direct challenge both to Abu Mazen's policy and to his authority. Israel's follow-up assassination attempt against Abdel Aziz al-Rantisi, a top Hamas political leader, was in turn a calculated provocation that was immediately followed by a suicide bombing.

The Bush Administration has its own formidable political hurdles to overcome, perhaps chief among them the Christian evangelical constituency, which strongly opposes any Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories. This lobby, combined with the more established and well-organized pro-Israel lobby represented by AIPAC et al., holds powerful sway over Congress. Indeed, Benny Elon, a far-right minister in Sharon's Cabinet who supports perpetual Israeli sovereignty over all the occupied territories and eventual "transfer" (that is, expulsion) of the Palestinians, is given an enthusiastic reception by Congressional leaders.

The recent promises by Sharon's government to eliminate some, or even all, of the "illegal" settlement outposts (as if to imply that all the settlements are not equally illegal) should not be allowed to obscure Israel's long-term policy vis-à-vis the occupation, most concretely demonstrated by the vast, multimillion-dollar "separation wall" now under construction. Seventy-five miles of this forbidding structure have already been built, with a total projected length of more than 200 miles. The wall, which is more than twenty feet high, with guard towers, electronic fences and two-lane patrol roads, would annex up to 10 percent of the West Bank to Israel; it has already cut off thousands of Palestinians from the rest of the West Bank and from their agricultural lands. The 40,000 citizens of Qalqilya, for example, are now surrounded on three sides by this wall, and most of their farmland has been seized. They are now virtually imprisoned.

This is a grim scenario, but the situation still offers some possibility of forward movement. A recent poll by Israel's Jaffee Institute for Strategic Studies shows that 56 percent of Israelis—up from 48 percent last year—would "support a unilateral withdrawal from the territories in the context of a peace accord, even if that

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COMMENT

meant ceding all settlements." Here is the signpost for a realistic road map that could be charted by the Bush Administration. If the Administration were to insist unequivocally on a total Israeli withdrawal from the territories as part of a regional peace treaty, it would find widespread support within Israel, perhaps far more than expected. And Washington could use the power of its purse to ease the transition, guaranteeing a subsidy for every Israeli settler moving back to Israel proper. There would no doubt be resistance from the Washington lobbyists and Congress, but the Administration would have compelling arguments on its side. Thirty-two months of conflict have not only devastated the Palestinian civil society and economy, they have led Israel to a dead end. The dream of Greater Israel has become a nightmare.

Israel is now at a fateful crossroads: One path leads to continued occupation, repression of Palestinians and their rebellion, which can only lead to further international isolation and worsen an economy already experiencing 11 percent unemployment and exploding budget deficits. The other path would involve a decisive confrontation with the settler extremists, but it would also lead to a final resolution of the conflict, not only with the Palestinians but with the entire Arab world. ROANE CAREY

Roane Carey is the editor of The New Intifada *(Verso) and, with Jonathan Shainin, of* The Other Israel *(New Press).*

CALVIN TRILLIN

BUSH, CHENEY, RUMSFELD AND, ALAS, POWELL TALK TO THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

They pushed the CIA to say
That nukes could quickly come our way—
Saddam might, with a finger snap,
Remove Chicago from the map.
They took a lack of proof in stride.
They simply lied.

Intelligence? The Pentagon's
Came straight from dorkish neocons
Employed to find Iraq in back
Of every terrorist attack.
With facts that failed to serve their side,
They simply lied.

The war's opponents they'd deride
As wimps who'd like to run and hide
From threats we simply can't abide.
The Gulf of Tonkin was their guide:
They simply lied, and lied, and lied.

A Rebuke to Ashcroft

"We have to hold these people until we find out what is going on." According to a report issued June 2 by the Justice Department's own Inspector General, that's what Michael Chertoff, head of the department's criminal division, told his deputy in the wake of the September 11, 2001, attacks. He was referring to hundreds of immigrants swept up and labeled "of interest" to the 9/11 investigation. The report finds that in order to "hold these people," high-level Justice Department officials exploited immigration law for purposes it was never designed for—denying immigrants bond without evidence that they were dangerous, holding them incommunicado under unduly harsh conditions and keeping them locked up for months, even after they had agreed to leave the country.

The immigrants, nearly all Arab or Muslim, were picked up on flimsy or no evidence and held as long as the FBI could not rule out that they might somehow be connected to the attacks. The government charged them with routine immigration violations and adopted a blanket, and blatantly illegal, policy of denying bond even when it had no reason to believe that a detainee posed a danger or flight risk. The Immigration and Naturalization Service adopted an official practice of seeking continuances and extensions to obscure the fact that it had no evidence and to keep immigrants detained without hearings.

The only legitimate purpose for immigration detention is to remove a person from the country. But the Inspector General reports that long after the cases were resolved and immigrants had agreed to leave, they were kept behind bars, solely because the FBI had not yet cleared them of connection to terrorism, a process that took an average of eighty days and as long as 244 days.

Most remarkable, not a single one of the more than 700 people held as "of interest" to the 9/11 investigation was charged with the crimes of that day, or with any terrorist crime whatsoever. Virtually all were cleared of any connection to terrorism. The government had presumed them guilty of terrorism, but they turned out to be innocent. Yet they were all treated as terrorists and held and tried in secret. Many were placed in twenty-three-hour lockdown and held for an initial period of weeks, in which they were not allowed to communicate with their families, their lawyers or their fellow inmates.

The Justice Department's response to the Inspector General's report was classic Ashcroft. He not only refused to apologize but actually had the nerve to treat it as a validation, not an indictment, of his actions. Department spokeswoman Barbara Comstock claimed that "the Inspector General's report is fully consistent with what courts have ruled over and over—that our actions are fully within the law and necessary to protect the American people."

In fact, the Inspector General never suggested that the government's actions were legal—he explicitly declines to adopt a legal conclusion either way. But the Justice Department has advised its officials to obtain lawyers for their defense. And for good reason. Contrary to Comstock, all but one of the courts that have addressed the government's treatment of the detainees have found

(Continued on Page 24)

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EDWARD SOREL & RICHARD LINGEMAN

Religion in the News

NOW IF I WAS (HIC) IF I WAS PRESIDENT, THE FIRST THING I'D DO (HIC) I'D DO IS KICK SOME ASS AT THE UNITED NATIONS. IT'S ABOUT TIME WE SHOWED 'EM (HIC) SHOWED 'EM WHO'S GOT THE WARHEADS. KNOW WHADDA MEAN?
BEFORE DUBYA FOUND GOD
OF COURSE WE INTEND TO WORK CLOSELY WITH THE UNITED NATIONS, BUT WE HAVE AN OBLIGATION TO LOOK AFTER OUR NATIONAL SECURITY AND IF THAT MEANS GOIN....
AFTER DUBYA FOUND GOD
E.S.

"You know, I had a drinking problem. Right now, I should be in a bar in Texas, not the Oval Office. There is only one reason that I am in the Oval Office and not in a bar: I found faith. I found God. I am here because of the power of prayer."

—George W. Bush, September 2002

"What I would like to see [in Iraq] is a government where church and state are separated." —George W. Bush, April 25, 2003

Shall We Gather at the Pork Barrel

Unable to persuade Congress to pass his legislation making religious groups eligible for federal funding, George W. Bush issued an executive order doing so. It bars discrimination "on the basis of religion or religious belief in the administration or distribution of Federal financial assistance under social service programs." It also permits religious organizations receiving federal funding for social service programs to discriminate on the basis of religion and religious belief (also sexual orientation) in hiring. "God loves you, I love you, and you can count on us both!" Bush told a group of clergy after signing the order.

What a Friend We Have In Dubya

In January, Bush took up the cross again. He proposed a new regulation that would permit religious organizations to receive HUD grants to construct or remodel churches, synagogues or mosques, so long as some part of the building is used for "social services." Under current regulations, religious organizations receiving HUD money must prove their social welfare programs are "free from religious influences" (see "Religion in the News," January 6, for examples of religious groups misusing HUD money). Bush said this requirement is discriminatory because secular organizations are not required to prove they are free from religious influences. Good point. Let's start with proof from the Republican Party that *it* is free from religious influences.

On the Same Paige

Education Secretary Rod Paige says private religious schools that teach "the kind of values that I think are associated with Christian communities" are superior to public schools, "where there are so many different kids from different kinds of experiences."

Faith, Hope and Prosperity

In his State of the Union address Bush singled out, as an example of faith-based "recovery programs that do amazing work," Tonja Myles's "Set Free Indeed" Friday-night services for drug abusers at the Healing Place Church in Baton Rouge. Neither Myles nor her husband, Darren, is a trained substance-abuse counselor, and psychiatrists question the effectiveness of their prayer sessions. Nevertheless, they would be eligible for government grants. It is unclear whether the church's other programs, such as Growing Kids God's Way, for parents, and Cruisin' for Christ, for motorcycle buffs, could also receive federal dollars.

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JONATHAN SCHELL

No Doubt

It is notoriously difficult to prove a negative. At what point can you be sure that something *does not* in fact exist? For example, if I lose my glasses and begin to search for them in my apartment, when do I abandon the search and conclude: I must have left them at the office? Is it when I have checked all the pockets in my wardrobe? Looked under all the cushions in the apartment?

So it goes with the search for weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. Certainty may not come for a long time. Let's add that it was entirely reasonable to argue—though some disagreed—that Saddam Hussein possessed such weapons. After all, it's a matter of record that he had them before the Gulf War, and the United Nations inspectors sent in after the war to destroy them reported that some materials were still unaccounted for.

But questions of fact cannot be resolved by thinking. Evidence is required. And if the evidence is used to justify a war, then it must be both unchallengeable and readily producible. Before the war, the Bush Administration stated on dozens of occasions and in the most unequivocal terms that it had such evidence. Now—nine weeks after the end of Saddam's regime—it is clear that no evidence of the required quality existed. The public trust was abused. The world was deceived. That the unequivocal evidence was missing before the war will remain a fact even if, somewhere down the road, weapons of mass destruction are found. "We know where they are," Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld said. But he did not know. How could he, when the intelligence agency of his own Defense Department was stating that there was "no reliable information on whether Iraq is producing and stockpiling chemical weapons, or where Iraq has—or will—establish its chemical warfare agent production facilities." The war was fought on false premises. One might hope that some of the war's supporters would now reconsider their position. I know of no such case. Instead, we have been presented with an entire bestiary of excuses—ones so inventive, it has some interest in its own right.

1. *The UN Said So.* Columnist Robert Kagan of the *Washington Post* has written an almost touchingly plaintive column listing all those who credited the mistake, as if widespread belief could make falsehood true. Among those mentioned are not only President Clinton and other Clinton officials but, of all people, the leaders of Germany and France—temporarily de-demonized for the purpose. Even the head of the UN inspection team, Hans Blix, is cited. In fact, of course, Blix never stated, as the Bush Administration did, that there *were* weapons of mass destruction but only that there was *some evidence that there might be* weapons of mass destruction. The crux of the argument was whether the inspectors should be given more time to resolve doubt into certainty—one way or another. The Administration itself has joined in the unexpected rehabilitation of the UN. The White House communications director, Dan Bartlett, has said there is proof of an Iraqi weapons of mass destruction program because "the UN Security Council passed a resolution that confirmed it."

2. *The War Was Really About Something Else.* There are innumerable variations on this theme. Senator John McCain, who once toured the country in a bus called The Straight Talk Express, now says, "The American people support what the President did, whether we find those weapons or not, and they did so the day they saw 9- and 10-year-old boys coming out of a prison in Baghdad." It seems that the straight talk McCain required of candidates is not needed by Presidents. None other than arch-hawk Deputy Defense Secretary Paul Wolfowitz has said the choice of the WMD justification had "a lot to do with the US government bureaucracy, we settled on the one issue that everyone could agree on, which was weapons of mass destruction as the core reason."

The idea that the war was really about something else all along has been especially popular among its more liberal supporters. Former *Nation* columnist Christopher Hitchens reserves "the right" to be for the war for reasons other than those given by the Administration. Thomas Friedman, who, it must be said, never did express worry about Iraqi weapons of mass destruction and instead supported the war as a way to "democratize" the Middle East, confesses, "I have to admit that I've always been fighting my own war in Iraq." The trouble, of course, is that Hitchens and Friedman are not deciding policy. The world doesn't get the war as described in their columns; it gets the real war the Administration actually is fighting. They are supporting a phantasm.

3. *They Didn't Really Mean It.* In an editorial dismissing the importance of the evidentiary fiasco, the *Washington Post* admits, "Some of the claims tossed off by Vice President Cheney and other senior officials in the heat of the debate appear unlikely to be borne out." Very likely the Vice President of the United States just got carried away when, in a prepared speech on August 26 to the Veterans of Foreign Wars, he announced, "Simply stated, there is no doubt that Saddam Hussein has weapons of mass destruction." And perhaps the President was merely hot under the collar when he used the "no doubt" language in his last press conference before the launch of the war.

4. *We've Already "Found the Weapons of Mass Destruction."* This from the President himself, in a statement made in Poland, referring to trailers found in Iraq that may or may not have been built to produce biological weapons. But soon he seemed to take it back, stating at the military base in Doha, Qatar, "We're on the look" for the weapons. A few days after that, he shifted again: "I am absolutely convinced with time we'll find out they did have a weapons program." As things stood at that moment according to the President, his Administration had (1) found weapons of mass destruction but (2) not yet found a weapons of mass destruction program. The facts on the ground showed nearly the opposite: inconclusive evidence of a program (the trailers) but no weapons. So "programs" and "weapons" were now the same and our government had at the same time found and not found both. The President seemed bent on demonstrating, publicly and swiftly, the factual illiteracy that his Administration demonstrated secretly and in slow motion as it took the United States to war.

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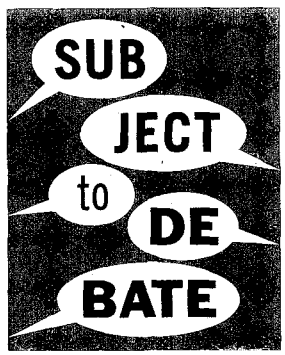
KATHA POLLITT

Blond Ambition



Hillary Clinton's autobiography comes out barely a week after Martha Stewart is indicted for obstruction of justice and fraud related to alleged insider trading, and you *still* don't believe in God? Two blond middle-aged icons of female pre-eminence, each virtually unique in the testosterone-drenched worlds of politics and business, are ruling the headlines and obsessing the talk shows at exactly the same moment—how likely is that? Obviously this is some kind of harmonic convergence intended to induce mass heart attacks at Fox News. It's not just the sheer excitement—"Hil: Wanted to Wring His Neck"! "Martha's Mug Shots"!—that's raising pulses. It's the fact that despite everything, millions of women insist on adoring them anyway.

I've written many a column criticizing Hillary Clinton for the rightward tilt of her politics—her support for welfare reform, capital punishment, "family values" and so on. I even made a catty remark about her hairband back in 1992, for which I'm truly sorry. Truth, moreover, compels me to admit that *Living History*, her mega-hyped memoir, has that unfortunate, processed-cheese, as-told-to taste. It's the verbal equivalent of her Barbara Walters appearance: one long fixed, glazed smile under the pink lights. But none of that matters. People aren't lining up by the thousands to purchase signed copies because they want to get the real scoop on tax policy or even Travelgate. They want to know if she really believed Bill when he told her there was nothing to the Monica story, how she felt when she finally learned it was true and why she stays with him. The answers to be found in her book are yes; she was really upset; and thanks to prayer and marriage counseling she was eventually able to move on.

Whether this is the whole truth is impossible for a stranger to know. Like Joe Klein, I tend to believe she really loved him—she writes in the book about her first impression of him as a "Viking" and lyrically describes his hands, his boundless energy, his fascinating conversation. I was ready to date him myself! She certainly wouldn't be the first smart, straitlaced woman who fell for a sexy charmer and ended up, as the joke goes, believing what he told her instead of what she saw. Nor, on the other hand, would she be the first wife who decided to live with what she couldn't change rather than throw away a relationship that was also a way of life. Or the first First Lady who put up a good front in public while quietly seething at home. I doubt the right-wingers going after Hillary for staying with Bill would have cheered if evidence of George Bush Sr.'s rumored infidelities had come to light and Barbara had abandoned him in his hour of need. Hillary must be the only woman the family-values crowd has ever castigated for sticking with her marriage. Just you try suggesting, though, that Pat Nixon was maybe not the most fulfilled woman in America, or that Laura Bush sometimes looks a little subdued, a little out of focus, and see how fast you get accused of being an East Coast elitist, slut and traitor.

For the right, Hillary's book comes just in time. In the third year of the Bush Administration, it was beginning to look like conservatives might finally have to acknowledge that Bill Clinton is not President anymore. Now they can sink into a nostalgic delirium—ah, for the days of Whitewater, Morgan Guaranty, Gennifer Flowers, Paula Jones, Vince Foster and all the other horrors from which the Supreme Court rescued us in December 2000. Hillary's book is handy, too, in helping Bill Kristol and his fellow talking heads brush aside pesky questions about the shifting rationales for invading Iraq, and those missing WMDs. Could Bush have been shading the truth? No, it was Bill Clinton who "lied to the American people." Right, and about something so very important, too! In right-wing mythology, if Hillary knew about Bill's women she is an ambitious schemer; if she didn't, writes Jonathan Alter in *Newsweek*, she's not fit for higher office: "Blinders are understandable in a wife, but could be a concern in a future president." According to Alter, when Bush claimed an "imminent threat" from Iraq or said the "average" tax cut is $1,000 a year, "he is deceiving us, not himself," a pettier crime. So if there's one thing worse than lying to the American people, it's believing your husband is telling the truth.

One hears so much from people who hate Hillary, one forgets that millions think she's great, a self-made working wife and mother who actually managed to turn the routine subordinations—and, in her case, profound humiliations—of political wifehood into real power: from First Lady to senator! Martha Stewart offers the same contradictory blend of traditional femininity and modern feminism: She is a brilliant businesswoman, but she sells retro domesticity. Her fans seem to have no trouble integrating these two rather different visions of womanhood or believing that she's been singled out for prosecution as a woman while Ken Lay walks free. Marthatalks.com, a website she set up to mobilize support, has received 7 million hits and features fervent e-mails thanking her for introducing graciousness and beauty into harried and humdrum lives. And why not? Martha never tells women they should quit their jobs in order to make apple pie from their very own organic orchard. She doesn't say they're ruining their kids and ought to work harder at sex. She just tells them a lot of neat stuff about, oh, slipper chairs and how to take the thorns off roses.

Martha's reputation as a first-class bitch (on full view in Cybill Shepherd's portrayal in a recent NBC movie) hasn't put a dent in her cult, and that's only fair. This is a nation that reveres Donald Trump, for heaven's sake, who famously trashed his wife and has devoted his entire life to profiting off gambling and hideous buildings. Donald Trump, icon of manly capitalism, destroyed the beautiful Art Deco frieze on the Bonwit Teller building after promising to preserve it. That's a lot worse than $45,000 worth of insider trading, in my view. True, Trump is a man, and successful men have always been allowed to be mean and worse than mean; only women have to be sweet, kind, gentle, modest, sexually circumspect and scrupulously honest 24/7 no matter what—even in the nasty worlds of politics and business.

Or they did until Hillary and Martha came along. ■

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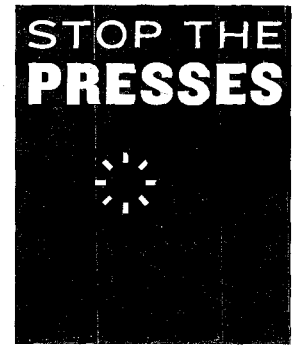
ERIC ALTERMAN

When It Raines...



Where do I begin? In a week when it became increasingly obvious that the President, the Vice President, the Defense Secretary, the Secretary of State and virtually all their underlings had deliberately misled Congress, the United Nations, the American people and the people of the world about the reasons the United States and Britain invaded Iraq, and when the Federal Communications Commission delivered a potentially crippling blow to media-based democracy and ideological diversity, the biggest story in America is the resignation of the two top editors of the *New York Times*.

It's not as if the departure of Howell Raines and Gerald Boyd from the newspaper of record is not significant. Obviously, it is. But as with any media frenzy, one has to ask whose agendas are being served by the obsessive overkill.

After wading through the hundreds of thousands of words that have been devoted to *Times* analysis since Jayson Blair became the black face du jour (joining the company of the other entertainers, athletes, liars and criminals so frequently chosen to represent black America on the cover of *Time* and *Newsweek*), I'd summarize the accepted storyline as follows.

(1) Howell Raines was a guilt-ridden Southern liberal who cut the psychopathic Blair break after break because Raines's commitment to affirmative action was so strong it overrode his news judgment.

(2) Because Raines was also an insular tyrant who brooked no criticism—"Caligula," in the words of one staffer—the dysfunctional aspects of the *Times* newsroom could not be corrected. Hence Blair's obvious fabrications went uncorrected while many of the paper's most talented reporters departed for less traumatic pastures.

(3) Rick Bragg's dishonest reporting method was of a piece with Raines's indulgence of Blair. Like Blair, Bragg was a member of Raines's coterie. This meant he could get away with almost anything as long as no one complained too publicly or too powerfully. When Bragg decided to go down in flames by smearing all his colleagues as just as lazy and dishonest as he was—and Raines did not defend his own newsroom against this calumny—the peasants moved into open revolt.

(4) The existence of Jim Romenesko's Media News site and Howard Kurtz's *Washington Post* column—together with frequent web-only updates by *Newsweek*'s Seth Mnookin—allowed *Times* reporters to give voice to their anger and frustration with such speed and force that the Sulzbergers could no longer ignore it. Raines and Boyd had a constituency of one, and they eventually lost it. End of story.

All of the above is fairly accurate, but only in the broad strokes. Just as important are the plots that the agreed-upon narrative decides to ignore, exploit or assimilate. Take for instance the problem alleged to lie at its center: affirmative action.

It's a rather tortured path to argue, as a few people have, that the myriad indulgences visited upon Jayson Blair were unrelated to the *Times*'s aggressive pursuit of "diversity" in its newsroom. The *Times* is justly proud of this pursuit, and Raines himself admitted that he, "as a white man from Alabama, with those convictions, gave [Blair] one chance too many by not stopping his appointment to the sniper team."

To be an honest defender of affirmative action, one must face up to its failures. As Rick Hertzberg observed in *The New Yorker*, "Affirmative action is strong medicine, and, as with any strong medicine, no great distance separates the therapeutic dose from the toxic one. It demands close monitoring of its institutional side effects." One of its frequent side effects is the creation of a culture of resentment among those who do not fall into any of its categories. If *The Nation*, in the name of diversity, gave my column to a less qualified woman or minority writer, I'd be pretty goddamn resentful. This kind of affirmative-action fallout is predictable and probably unavoidable.

But what is the alternative? Do we really want to live in a world like that of the 1950s, when, according to an industrywide survey reported by Eric Boehlert in *Salon*, "just thirty-eight blacks were working among the nation's 75,000 newsroom employees"? I'd hazard a guess that the number of Asians, Latinos and other minorities didn't make it into double digits and that the total number of minorities in top executive positions hovered near zero.

The problem with Raines's version of affirmative action is not only the patronizing and ultimately self-defeating manner in which he treated the undeserving Blair but also the degree to which he indulged his chosen white cronies, like Bragg, with similar special treatment. Just as conservatives never mention that people like George W. Bush are the beneficiaries of affirmative action for lazy white sons of rich legacy parents, they seem unwilling to admit that race is only one place where people catch extra, unearned breaks. Bragg's byline bespoke a particular brand of braggadocio-cum-bullshit in story after story, thanks to an affirmative-action program that does not speak its name.

But skittishness about affirmative action does not begin to explain the degree of *Schadenfreude* on display over Raines's resignation. The legendary *Times* arrogance played a major role as well. "It ain't bragging if you really done it," Raines boasted when the paper copped its unprecedented seven Pulitzers in 2002. Perhaps, but it ain't nice neither, and people resent it. It's no secret that a significant amount of the media attention focused on the *Times* is coming from journalists envious of their more accomplished and admired competitors. Excuse me, but pot/kettle anyone? It's a bit audacious, after all, for Howard Kurtz to ask a guest on CNN's *Reliable Sources*, "Isn't there an insular culture at the *Times* that maybe contributed to the fact that these mistakes were brushed off and warning signs were missed, is something in the water there?" when Kurtz is allowed to keep his perch at CNN—which represents a clear conflict of interest

(Continued on Page 23)

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ARTICLES

DEFLATION

by WILLIAM GREIDER

It threatens the U.S.—and the world

At the risk of sounding like Chicken Little, I am going to describe the economic situation in plain English. The United States is flirting with a low-grade depression, one that may last for years unless the government takes decisive action to overcome it. This would most likely be depression with a small d, not the financial collapse and "grapes of wrath" devastation Americans experienced during the Great Depression of the 1930s. But the potential consequences, especially for the less affluent and the young, would be severe enough—a long interlude of sputtering stagnation, years of tepid growth and stubbornly high unemployment, punctuated occasionally with a renewed recession. Depression means an economy that is stuck in a ditch and cannot get out, unable to regain its normal energies for expansion. Japan, second-largest economy in the world, has been in this condition for roughly twelve years, following the collapse of its own financial bubble. If the same fate has befallen the United States, the globalized economy is imperiled, too, since America's market for imports and its huge trade deficits keep the global trading system afloat.

Most authorities, I should add, do not regard any of this as likely. The great difficulty for policy-makers is that this doesn't much feel like a crisis—not yet anyway, for most Americans. So where's the urgency to undertake radical remedies? Some of Wall Street's best forecasters, for instance, are predicting 4 percent US growth in the second half of 2003. But Japan experienced false recoveries, too. Nobody knows what will unfold if nothing is done, but the consequences of waiting to find out could be horrendous for the broad ranks of Americans. When the US economy corrects for its excesses, it is always the innocents who are led to the slaughter first. Even if the odds are only one in four that the worst will happen (as the Dallas Federal Reserve Bank president recently estimated), it seems reckless to gamble. Taking strong measures now would be messy and disruptive to regular order (maybe wasteful if they aren't needed), but in the present circumstances that would seem more prudent than a false optimism that lamely repeats that the "good times" are right around the corner.

A depression can be read as a "market signal" of a dysfunctional economy that requires fundamental restructuring. Japan learned this the hard way. In this case, such a signal may be flashing the need for deep changes both in the American economic system and the world's. Surely it is not too soon for Americans to ask themselves what might be out of whack and how to correct things—starting with their own much-celebrated economy.

I asked a financial economist at a major US hedge fund where the United States appears to be at this point. "We are in the second or third year of what Japan has gone through," he surmised. How much longer might this go on? "Another ten years," he said, "if you think about Japan, another ten years."

The good news, so to speak, is that the Federal Reserve is on the case. At least Fed Chairman Alan Greenspan and colleagues now acknowledge that the gravest danger lurking in this situation is a general deflation of prices, and they promise to make sure that doesn't happen. For many months, Greenspan and other governors dismissed the growing anxieties expressed in financial circles by describing the chances of deflation as "extremely small" and "quite unlikely." After the indexes for wholesale and consumer prices both fell in April, the Fed dropped those reassuring phrases. The chairman instead announced that pre-emptive actions may be needed to head off the threat. Declining prices, if they persist generally, create a vicious spiral of negatives—falling profits, more closed factories, shrinking employment and incomes, accompanied by waves of failing debtors, both corporations and families. In short, a far larger calamity than stagnation.

Though Greenspan doesn't say so in plain English, Fed governors recognize the corrective action that may be required of monetary policy: Pump up the money supply and deliberately

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induce rising prices—that is, foster a renewal of inflation, their old scourge. Rising prices provide an essential lubricant for any sustained recovery because a dose of inflation helps businesses get well and takes some of the depressive pressures off wages and debtors of every kind. The central bankers, however, are facing a very awkward moment. After twenty years of relentlessly reducing the inflation rate to near zero and winning great praise for their triumph, the governors are naturally reluctant to announce that the "disease" they conquered has become the "cure."

But at least the Fed is thinking about doing something. Washington's elected politicians, by contrast, continue to act as if this is just a temporary downturn in the normal business cycle, an opportunity to score political points with measures that show folks they care. Neither Republicans nor Democrats seem to grasp the enormity of what the economy is facing. Their ignorance matters. Without a full and contentious public airing of the cause-and-effect implications, there is no way to develop the political foundation for undertaking large and controversial measures. If Washington responds tentatively with cautious half-measures, as Japan's government did for many years, then the results for us may look a lot like Japan.

Basically, what's under way is a brutal unwinding of the delusional optimism that reigned during the 1990s.

Basically, what's under way is a brutal unwinding of the delusional optimism that reigned during the 1990s—excesses like the hyperinflation in financial assets and the swollen ambitions that led investors and companies to wildly overvalue their prospects for future returns. The stock-market bubble was the most obvious expression of excess, but not the most serious dimension. In an era of Internet fantasies and collective self-delusion, business sectors (and their financiers) overinvested on a grand scale and generally used borrowed money to do so. That is, they built too many factories, shopping centers and office buildings—creating more productive capacity than the marketplace could possibly absorb. Consumers indulged in their own version of wishful thinking, borrowing heavily to keep on buying, hoping the "good times" would last long enough to bail them out.

This legacy of accumulated excesses lies across the American economy like a heavy wet blanket—overcapacity in production, overpriced financial investments, mountainous debt burdens for corporations and households, and thus a deepening reluctance to invest or to consume. Personal debt is now at an extraordinary 130 percent of disposable income, up by nearly one-third since the mid-1990s. Manufacturing is operating at only 72.5 percent of its productive capacity, greater idleness than during the 1990–91 recession and approaching the severity of the 1982 recession. For producers of semiconductors and related electronic components, capacity utilization has fallen to 65 percent. In telecom equipment, it is at 50 percent. That's why there is so little new investment. What company is foolish enough to build new plants when so many existing ones are shuttered? And who would lend them the capital? If consumers run out of capacity to borrow more or can no longer refinance home mortgages, the collapse of aggregate demand will become far worse.

The US economy is unlikely to recover its full vigor until this dead weight from the past is substantially reduced. In the meantime, the struggle of companies (and other countries) to dump their excess production by selling cheap, while also shrinking jobs and workweeks, threatens to make things still worse, eventually tipping into a general deflation of prices. The broader meaning of deflation, however, is that assets of almost every kind, from financial investments and real estate to manufactured goods and commodities, are being revalued downward—slowly, steadily correcting for the falsely optimistic asset valuations achieved during the boom years. The overvaluations, though most dramatic in Japan and the United States, were transmitted worldwide through trade and the hyped-up energies of global investing. In this sense, deflation is already under way and started five or six years ago with the violent financial collapses that swept across developing nations in Asia and that continue to stalk weakening economies on other continents. China, given its burgeoning low-wage output, is now the world's main deflationary engine. Its exports are underpricing Japan's and taking market share away from other poor countries, thus forcing rival producers to lower prices still further (China now has the largest trade surplus with the United States, surpassing Japan). When too many goods are chasing too few buyers, the main game is to make sure someone else gets stuck with the unsold surpluses.

In another era, there would be clamoring voices not only from the political sphere but also from business and finance demanding bold action by Washington. In this era of conservative orthodoxy, there is general complacency and silence, as if everyone agrees that the ugly possibilities will go away if nobody talks about them. Aside from subdued kibitzing of the Fed by selected financial experts, there is no debate on these momentous matters. Governing elites are deeply enthralled by "market fundamentalism" and dare not speak of the alternatives (or perhaps don't even know about them). The principal remedies sound to them like liberal heresies. And they are. This political passivity may give way once the presidential campaign heats up. Howard Dean was evidently the first Democratic candidate to invoke the "d word" when he recently warned Iowans: "If we re-elect this President, we'll be in a depression."

In broad strokes, the government has the power to intervene on three fundamental fronts to remove the depressing overhang from the past. First, the Federal Reserve can deliberately induce price inflation to counter the deflationary forces and excite what Keynes called the "animal spirits" of business leaders. Rising prices will also automatically ease the debt burdens of borrowers by diluting money's real value (that's why creditors always adamantly oppose inflation). Second, Congress and the White House can simultaneously launch a major stimulus program composed of public spending and quick-acting tax cuts, thus running up far larger budget deficits than the Bush Administration has engineered. Whether the money builds schools and highways or hires more schoolteachers, it creates new jobs, incomes and business activity. Finally, if these steps are insufficient, the government may have to intervene more directly and manage a substantial liquidation of debt burdens—either arrange ways to write off failed loans (as it did in the savings-and-loan crisis of the

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1980s) or create more lenient terms for the indebted companies and households, much like a banker's "workout" for a financially troubled business.

If this negative cycle worsens to extremes, only the federal government can interrupt it and push the economy in a positive direction. The basic task, as John Maynard Keynes explained in the thirties, is to get the money moving again. The government does this by borrowing idle wealth from the private sector and spending it or distributing it to taxpayers who will—thus putting the money to economic uses and stimulating business activity. Federal deficits, in other words, are an essential element in the solution—very large deficits if you intend to jump-start a $10.7 trillion economy. Yes, borrow-and-spend therapy increases the national debt, but the renewal of economic growth will handle that. (The alternative—doing nothing—means allowing events to take their own course toward destruction and multiplying failures. "Liquidate labor, liquidate stocks, liquidate the farmers, liquidate real estate," Andrew Mellon advised Herbert Hoover after the 1929 crash. "It will purge the rottenness out of the system.")

The political choice is, Act now or wait and see. In terms of this three-pronged crisis prevention, only the Federal Reserve has shown any awareness of what may be required of it (revive the economy by reviving inflation), perhaps because the Fed's historic disgrace was its failure to act after 1929. Last fall, Fed governor Ben Bernanke reassured the worriers in a boldly stated speech: "The US government has a technology, called a printing press (or, today, its electronic equivalent), that allows it to produce as many US dollars as it wishes at essentially no cost.... A determined government can always generate higher spending and hence positive inflation."

Bush is pursuing 'trickledown' Keynes—help the wealthiest households get back their zest as consumers, and the rabble will surely follow.

To underscore the commitment, Bernanke said the Fed is prepared to use unorthodox tools to expand the money supply if short-term interest rates (already close to zero) can be cut no further. Instead of buying only short-term Treasury notes to inject new money into the economy, the central bank may purchase long-term US bonds or foreign bonds. It may accept corporate debt, private bank loans and mortgage securities as collateral for the Fed's direct lending to banks—a way of pushing bankers to lend more generously to business. In fact, the Fed has far broader powers inherited from the Great Depression—the ability to make emergency loans to private businesses or state and local governments in extreme circumstances. But will the Fed act? Some financial insiders are not persuaded by the official statements. One told me that only three or four of the key decision makers on the nineteen-member Federal Open Market Committee take the deflation potential seriously—those who closely followed the slow-motion unwinding of Japan.

By comparison, the more visible fiscal debate in Congress is utterly out of sync with present reality, since both parties are dodging the "d word" and its implications. The White House, I am told, is deeply worried in private, but won't say so for fear of adding to the public's anxieties. The GOP's misdirected tax cutting does help modestly, putting money in motion by enlarging the federal deficits, but Bush is pursuing "trickledown" Keynes—help the wealthiest households get back their zest as consumers, and the rabble will surely follow. Democrats, on the other hand, are still playing the loser's role of Herbert Hoover and worrying obsessively about the rising deficits—wrong economics and bad politics too. Instead of fighting the last war, a clearheaded opposition would be leaning hard on the Fed and the White House for immediate preventive actions, advocating easy money, credit reform and aggressive public spending to restart the economic engine.

If things deteriorate further, who knows, the government's deficits may have to grow twice as large to become effective therapy. While the political climate is not yet ripe, forward-looking progressives should already be drawing up a grand list of spending projects—repairing the tattered infrastructure and launching innovative public investments that speak to the future. If the money builds real improvements for society, it will not be wasted, even if the Chicken Littles are wrong.

The third avenue for dealing with the potential crisis—reducing the mountainous debt burdens on families and businesses—is a far more controversial challenge and fraught with the potential for insider favoritism. Rescuing the big boys while allowing others to drown has been the conventional approach in recent decades, including the banking bailouts engineered by the Fed. But a lively political debate might inspire broader remedies that are both more equitable and more effective. Just as the S&L bailout fifteen years ago aided major financial players, government could create a "resolution trust corporation" for people—an agency that supervises debt workouts for households, gives them more time to catch up with mortgage and credit card payments, and imposes these relaxed terms on the financial industry, with government guarantees against failure. That would represent stimulus with a democratic bottom line. More likely, we will see one industrial sector after another line up for emergency bailouts, and the government, including the Fed, will pick winners and losers, defending politically influential elements of the status quo in the name of protecting the soundness of the system.

If fundamental restructuring is also in store for America, the US economy has advantages that Japan's lacks. The American system is more flexible and able to adapt—more willing to throw the losers over the side—while Japan's dense webs of business-financial relationships promote mutual loyalties that are very difficult to dismantle. On the other hand, Americans may discover in the next few years that the United States is not the economic powerhouse described in popular lore. Technological strengths notwithstanding, many US sectors have steadily lost market share, both at home and abroad, to foreign competitors (think of Boeing being surpassed by Airbus as the leading producer of commercial airliners).

"Painful adjustment" means facing up to some long-suppressed truths. Washington's single-minded championing of globalization, for instance, has been good for US multinationals but not for the balance sheet of the American economy, which is underwater and has been for years. That is the meaning of the huge trade deficits, the accumulating indebtedness that

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inevitably will produce a painful reckoning in standards of living (as a nation, we manage to consume more than we produce by borrowing every year from abroad).

But the even larger reality is that America's weakening position signals the need for a deep restructuring of globalization as well. The globalized system the United States launched and protected throughout the cold war decades approaches its own reckoning with the dilemma of too many factories and not enough buyers. Escaping this condition will require fiendishly difficult diplomacy (made more so by the Bush Administration's cockeyed imperialism), but the risks are historic in dimension (the global trading system disintegrated after 1929 as worldwide depression led nations to protect their own producers and markets from foreign competitors). First, leading nations must join to launch worldwide stimulative policies and persuade rising nations like China not to bring down the system by overwhelming rival producers. The fundamental solution, however, involves the kind of moderating reforms advocated by antiglobalization activists worldwide—rules to rebalance the system and genuinely promote wages as well as output, financial terms that give developing countries more time and space to seek their own distinctive economic plans, plus new institutions of governance that are truly equitable and democratic, instead of corporatized lawmaking. That's a very tall order for statesmanship in a world presently governed by small-minded men.

Meanwhile, the economic dysfunction in the American system involves many other contentious questions, including the overbearing scale of certain dominant enterprises. The spectacular costs of allowing ever-growing bigness in corporations are reflected every day in the news (think of the doomed AOL Time Warner merger that has lost more than $200 billion for investors, or the scandalous behavior of financial mega-firms like Citigroup, or the conglomerate homogenization of broadcasting). The gathering evidence also suggests that the mass-consumption economy that has flourished since World War II may at last be running out of gas. Too many indebted consumers are tapped out or will be in hard times. Who's going to buy all this stuff? Is this weakened condition related to the gross and growing wage inequalities of the past two decades?

The "market signal" of small-d depression might be saying: Don't invest more in the old stuff since we've already got too many shopping centers. Start investing in "problems" the country has long neglected—see these really as economic opportunities. Invest in the energy technologies and industrial transformations required for the posthydrocarbons age of ecologically sustainable prosperity. Invest in healthcare and transportation and production systems to deliver safe, healthy food. Invest in the smaller, more nimble firms ready to do things differently. Invest in people—the human development that begins with children at a very early age. These and other investment opportunities are where the future jobs and higher returns are most likely to be found. The status quo interests will naturally resist such shifts in purpose and deploy their political muscle to block any promising departures. But a fundamental restructuring at least would open the way to think anew, to strive for a different kind of politics. If the Chicken Littles turn out to be right, a pivotal moment is approaching, one that may be both dreadful and promising. ■

Letter From Kurdistan

by Joshua Kucera

While change has swept most of Iraq since the United States and Britain toppled Saddam Hussein, in the far north of the country things are going pretty much as before. Men in baggy Kurdish pants sell fine cloth and live chickens in the market, and children and teenagers go to the amusement park in the evenings. There are no protests, no looting, and people are free to denounce Hussein. Since the first Gulf War, the Kurds in the north have operated an autonomous zone that has nearly no contact with the rest of Iraq. It has its own flag, army and parliament, and uses the old Iraqi dinars—the ones without Saddam Hussein's face. So the signs of change in Erbil, the main city of the north, are few: Arabs from formerly government-controlled areas buy satellite dishes and set up Hotmail accounts in the city's many Internet cafes; entrepreneurs hawk US Army Humanitarian Daily Rations in the street; US soldiers buy Pringles and Kurdish-English dictionaries.

Joshua Kucera is a freelance journalist who has extensively covered Iraqi Kurdistan.

The air of normalcy is deceptive, though. For the past twelve years Kurdistan has been governed by two militias posing as political parties: the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), which controls the western half, including Erbil; and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), which rules the eastern part from its capital of Sulaimaniya. The two parties like to tout their democratic credentials—a parliament, a free press. Spend much time here, however, and you see that the appearance of democracy is just that, a facade. The few people in Kurdistan who are ignoring that fact seem to be the Americans now in charge. For years they have promoted the breakaway region as an example of what a democratic Iraq could look like, and now they are strengthening their cozy relationship with the KDP and PUK. It's a development that deeply disappoints many Kurds, and should make other Iraqis wonder if the United States is truly interested in building a democratic Iraq or merely a pro-American one.

The KDP and PUK began as guerrilla movements; when the Iraqi government withdrew from the north in 1991 they assumed control. They organized elections in 1992 and tried to share power

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but couldn't agree on how to split hundreds of millions of dollars in revenues from oil smuggling from Iraq to Turkey. That led to a four-year civil war, which ended with the two parties simply splitting the territory. There haven't been any more Kurdistanwide elections, though both halves have had one municipal election each. The Parliament, which is supposed to represent both, only reconvened last fall, and has done little but pass resolutions. "Now what you have is a one-party system here and a one-party system in Sulaimaniya," says Hussain Sinjari, a former PUK minister of municipalities who quit in protest, he says, over the KDP-PUK infighting. He now heads the Iraq Institute for Democracy, a nonprofit funded in part by the National Endowment for Democracy; the institute holds seminars on democracy for young people and runs a polling agency and two newspapers.

Newsstands in Kurdistan hold dozens of newspapers in several languages. But look closely at the headlines and you see there's not a lot of unbiased information or lively debate. A recent copy of one major Erbil-based paper, *Khabat*, featured headlines like "The Time of Calling Kurdish People Second-Class Citizens Has Passed" and "Since the First Day of Liberation of Kirkuk, the Regional Government of Kurdistan Is Providing for the Needs of Kirkuk Hospital." The one exception is *Hawlati*, a weekly newspaper based in Sulaimaniya. Journalists for the paper have been jailed on three occasions in the past two years for writing things the government didn't like, such as a story on drug trafficking. On several other occasions journalists have been called into government offices or had their phones or electricity cut off. "This is because we're the only independent newspaper in Kurdistan," says Rabin Rasul Ismail, who works in the paper's Erbil bureau. "The most sensitive subject is corruption and embezzlement."

'The KDP, PUK and the Baath Party are all the same' is a refrain that is common in Kurdistan, if somewhat of an exaggeration.

As with media, the case with civil society is deceptive. Drive around Erbil and you see dozens of organizations that officials like to show off as evidence of the thriving NGO sector. But again, all are controlled by the party. "You can see these organizations—the Kurdistan Doctors' Union, Lawyers' Union, Women's Union and so on. They are all from the KDP," Sinjari says. "They make these institutions to increase their power, just to create jobs for their followers."

The two major parties also have been accused of frequent human rights violations over the past twelve years, mainly arbitrary arrests of, and attacks on, political opponents. Islamist, Turkish and Assyrian Christian parties all say they have suffered abuses at the hands of the KDP and PUK. The most recent Human Rights Watch report on Kurdistan detailed arbitrary arrests and detentions of political opponents. Still, it was a marked improvement over the mid-1990s, when the two parties were regularly cited for "a wide array of abuses," including extrajudicial executions of political rivals.

One businessman in Erbil, who spent time in prison because of some connections with the rival PUK, claims, "People here have been disappeared, maybe hundreds of people, but we don't know because nobody speaks of it." A recent college graduate, who didn't want to give his name, says that people are afraid to voice their complaints to a foreigner. "Among ourselves, yes, but to foreigners we're supposed to give a good impression, that we're democratic and free." Public-sector jobs—which in Kurdistan are almost the only jobs that exist—are open only to party members, according to the graduate. "In this country party affiliation comes first. If you're not in the party, you can't do anything," he said. "The KDP, PUK and the Baath Party are all the same." It's a refrain that is common here, if somewhat of an exaggeration.

But it's not a view the Americans operating in Iraq share. The most high-profile American visitor to postwar Kurdistan, Jay Garner, repeatedly referred to Kurdistan as democratic and said it could be a model for the rest of Iraq. The US military, those connected with the Pentagon-based reconstruction effort and their State Department advisers are all working closely with the KDP and PUK. They say the ultimate fate of the structures in Kurdistan will be up to the Iraqi people, but privately say they have no problem with maintaining the status quo. One concrete sign of this was seen recently when US administrators in Iraq issued a directive disarming all the former opposition groups—except the KDP and the PUK.

This support is a payback to the KDP and PUK for the key logistical support they provided during the invasion of Iraq. After the US failure to secure rights to transport troops through Turkey, Washington turned to using small teams of special forces soldiers backed up with KDP and PUK militias, or *peshmerga*, they took under their command. When the *peshmerga* entered the northern cities of Kirkuk and Mosul they moved to take power. In Kirkuk, in particular, the PUK largely took over administration of the city with apparent American blessing, antagonizing the city's significant Arab and Turkish minorities. Now the Americans' northern reconstruction effort relies heavily on Kurdish manpower and logistical support supplied by the KDP and PUK. The first northern office of the Office of Humanitarian Assistance and Reconstruction was previously a luxury KDP guesthouse in what must be Iraq's only gated community.

The most striking thing about Kurdistan, and probably the major reason the US government likes to say that it is democratic, is how much its people love America. Mustafa Barzani, a great Iraqi Kurdish hero and father of current KDP leader Massoud Barzani, once suggested that Kurdistan become the fifty-first state. After US planes accidentally bombed a convoy of Kurdish troops and US special forces near Erbil during the war, killing eighteen Kurds and wounding dozens, including the brother of the KDP president, the KDP called a press conference to say that the incident would not hurt the Kurds' alliance with United States.

Even Sinjari, the former municipalities minister, wrote an editorial thanking America for liberating Iraq in a new newspaper he has started. But his love for America has its limits. "I've heard Bush and Rumsfeld talking about making Iraq a model for democracy in the Middle East, but if they're talking about the Kurdish model, it's a mockery," he says. He adds, "I'm a Western-minded, liberal, pro-America person, but I'll start to hate America if they support corrupt leaders like we have here." ■

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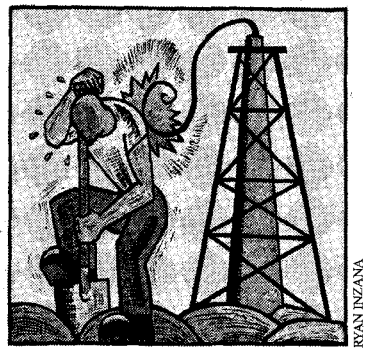
UNOCAL'S PIPELINE IN BURMA BECOMES A TEST CASE IN CORPORATE ACCOUNTABILITY.

Profits at Gunpoint

DAPHNE EVIATAR

Maung Maung was no stranger to the brutality of the government of Burma (called Myanmar by its military rulers). A former geologist and leader of the national mineworkers' union, Maung was forced to flee the country in 1988 when, following a massive citizens' uprising, a new military government began to arrest, torture and execute thousands of pro-democracy demonstrators. But Maung was nevertheless surprised when, nine years ago, he came across hundreds of Burmese crowded into a cluster of straw huts along the Thai-Burma border, a makeshift village that sank in the mud when it rained.



RYAN INZANA

Why had they fled Burma's lush Tenasserim district, a peninsula of coastline, farmland and thick forests, to live here like cattle? In a series of interviews with Maung, founder of the exiled Federation of Trade Unions of Burma, the villagers described armed military men expelling indigenous fishermen from their homes and farmers from their land, razing villages and enslaving their inhabitants. They reported that soldiers forced everyone from children to the elderly into labor, making them cut through thick swaths of jungle, build military installations and haul army equipment. All of this, Maung later learned, in order to prepare the area for a new gas pipeline.

One woman said soldiers came to her home as she was cooking over an open fire. When her husband attempted to flee, they shot him and shoved her and her baby into the flames, killing the baby and leaving her with disabling scars. Others described seeing their neighbors executed when they refused to leave their homes. Many who joined forced-work details collapsed from exhaustion or disease after weeks of toiling under a scorching sun with little food or water. Two girls said they were raped by soldiers at knifepoint.

Many of these victims are now plaintiffs in two landmark lawsuits against Unocal, part of a consortium of companies behind the gas pipeline. The outcomes may well determine whether American corporations will ever be forced to account for the brutal human rights abuses being committed around the world in their interests.

As has now been well documented by EarthRights International, a human rights group co-founded by former Burmese student activist Ka Hsaw Wa, the military began clearing the land and enslaving locals only after the oil companies initiated negotiations with the Burmese government to build the $1.2 billion project in 1990. The accounts collected by Ka Hsaw Wa and Maung are corroborated by volumes of sworn deposition testimony from villagers, filed under seal but cited in several court opinions. According to the testimony, plaintiffs' lawyers and further interviews conducted by such independent human rights organizations as Human Rights Watch, hundreds of villagers were driven from their homes and farms, and forced to work at gunpoint to prepare the area for the pipeline.

Led by the French oil company Total (now TotalFinaElf), the consortium entered into a joint venture with the Burmese government around 1995 to transport vast quantities of natural gas from the offshore Yadana field in the Andaman Sea through a pipeline that would extend east to Thailand. The pipeline would have to pass through Tenasserim, a region whose ethnic groups opposed military rule. Because its agreement with the companies required the Burmese government to protect the pipeline from sabotage, the government increased its military presence along that thirty-nine-mile stretch. According to testimony from villagers, many of those forced into service—cutting down trees, digging out stumps, building barracks and helipads—were beaten regularly by guards. Some of these same helipads were used to ferry Unocal officials when they came to inspect the project's progress.

To prevent workers from fleeing, the military took extreme measures. "There was a guy who had his hands and feet bound with seven people with rope," says Maung, who met the man while interviewing the villagers who had fled to the Thai border. "They were put in a pit to keep them from running away."

It was Maung who first brought the idea of suing the oil companies to attorney Terry Collingsworth, then an AFL-CIO representative in Nepal and a leader of the Washington, DC–based International Labor Rights Fund. Collingsworth, together with Burmese activists, decided to try using an obscure 1789 law known as the Alien Tort Claims Act, which grants noncitizens access to US courts in cases involving violations of international law. That act had been used before to prosecute torture by foreign military officers, but it had yet to be successfully used against a corporation whose officers hadn't personally perpetrated the abuses. In 1996 Collingsworth and the Labor Rights Fund used it to sue California-based Unocal on behalf of four Burmese villagers for encouraging and profiting from murder, torture, rape and slavery in Burma. About a month later, EarthRights International filed a similar lawsuit on behalf of fourteen others, targeting Unocal, Total and the state-run Burmese and Thai gas companies. (The plaintiffs in both cases remain anonymous to protect them from retaliation.) Although the court ruled that it had no jurisdiction over the foreign companies, the cases, remarkably, went forward against Unocal, and are now being considered together in California and federal courts.

Daphne Eviatar, a Brooklyn-based writer and attorney, is a contributing editor at The American Lawyer.

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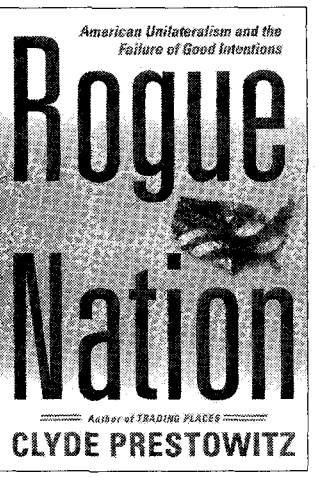

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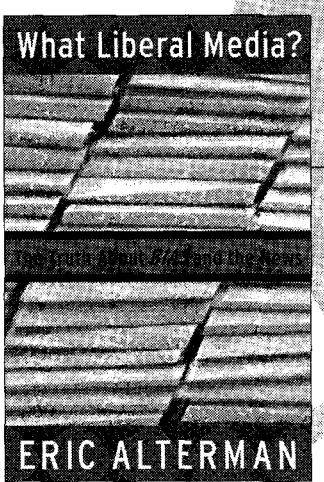

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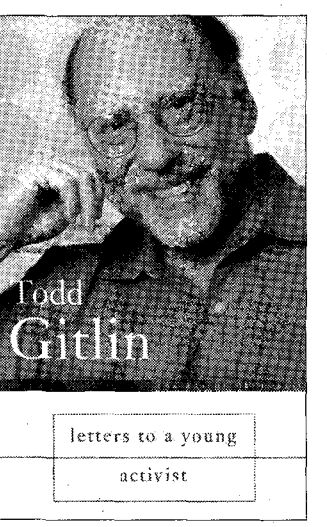

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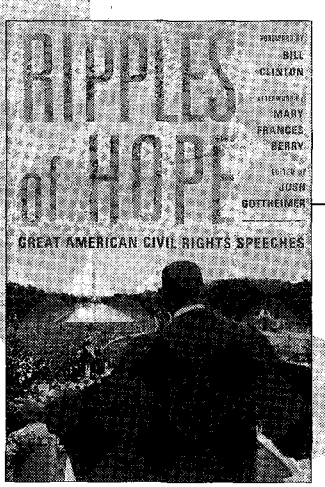

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The claims against Unocal are straightforward. The villagers argue that because the California company was a business partner of the Burmese government, whose military is notorious for using forced labor, the company is responsible for the systematic human rights violations the military committed in order to complete the company's pipeline. While charging an American company with slavery is controversial, there's nothing unusual in American courts holding a company responsible for the acts of its business partner. And international criminal tribunals have often held individuals responsible for "aiding and abetting" international crimes like genocide. Either of these grounds could allow the court to rule in the villagers' favor, forcing Unocal to face a trial.

On June 17, after years of legal wrangling—during which the case was dismissed, reinstated and then appealed—the US Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit will reconsider whether the company can be held responsible for forced labor and murder committed by the Burmese military in connection with the pipeline. Its decision will have implications far beyond Unocal and the Burmese villagers. Although the Alien Tort Claims Act, originally enacted to prosecute piracy, lay dormant for almost two centuries, human rights and labor activists are increasingly using it to charge American corporations with egregious violations of international law. The Labor Rights Fund alone has half a dozen such cases pending in federal courts around the country, claiming human rights abuses by Exxon Mobil in Indonesia, Coca-Cola in Colombia and Del Monte in Guatemala, among others. The New York–based Center for Constitutional Rights has used the law to charge Royal Dutch/Shell and ChevronTexaco with complicity in murder and military attacks in connection with their oil projects in Nigeria.

'If you threaten the pipeline, there's gonna be more military. If forced labor goes...with the military, yes, there will be more forced labor.'

The rising tide of these cases has alarmed American corporations. They're fighting back hard, filing briefs in support of the defendants and lobbying Congress to repeal or amend the Alien Tort Claims Act. Still, most courts' substantive decisions have favored the plaintiffs, and the cases are slowly marching ahead, with the case against Unocal taking the lead—and thus promising to set a precedent. If the Ninth Circuit rules that Unocal must face trial for collusion in murder, torture, rape and slavery, it will confirm that human rights activists have hit upon a powerful tool for holding corporations legally accountable for profiting off of the most despicable practices of abusive governments overseas.

The US government is working to prevent that. In May, Attorney General John Ashcroft filed a brief with the Ninth Circuit court denouncing the villagers' attempt to use the alien tort law to sue Unocal and arguing that every court that has allowed such claims for the past twenty years has been wrong. In a sweeping argument against legal accountability for human rights violations, the Administration argues that all suits filed under that law should be dismissed because they interfere with US foreign policy and undermine America's war on terrorism. Kenneth Roth, director of Human Rights Watch, calls Ashcroft's intervention "a craven attempt to protect human rights abusers." So far, no court has endorsed the Justice Department's view.

Unocal has fought this case every step of the way, refusing to acknowledge even basic facts surrounding the pipeline's construction. The company denies, for example, that under its contract with the state-owned Burmese gas company, the government had pledged to provide security for the pipeline. Yet Unocal's own documents, produced for the lawsuit, state that "the government of Myanmar is responsible for protecting the pipeline." Unocal's representative in Burma told the US Embassy that "the companies have hired the Burmese military to provide security for the project." Additional documents reveal that Unocal officials on the pipeline project held daily meetings with army commanders to tell them where they needed roads, military installations and security. And villagers have testified that Unocal officials regularly visited the pipeline site.

Unocal claims that it was unaware that the Burmese military regularly used forced labor. Yet Unocal's own consultants warned the company, according to court documents, that "throughout Burma the government habitually makes use of forced labour to construct roads." Even the US State Department reported at least as early as 1991 that the military government routinely uses forced labor. The United Nations issued more warnings of serious human rights abuses in 1995.

With the evidence mounting, Texaco, which had large investments in a Burma gas field, pulled out of the country in 1997. But Unocal retained a 28 percent interest in the pipeline, and then–Unocal president John Imle was defiant. At a January 1995 meeting with human rights organizations, he had argued that locals were threatening sabotage, adding, "If you threaten the pipeline there's gonna be more military. If forced labor goes hand and glove with the military, yes, there will be more forced labor. For every threat to the pipeline there will be a reaction."

If there remained any doubt, in March of that year Unocal's Burma representative, Joel Robinson, confirmed that he had received information from human rights groups that "depicted in more detail than I have seen before the increased encroachment of [the Burmese military's] activities into the villages of the pipeline area." Robinson concluded that Unocal's insistence that the military had not used forced labor on the company's behalf "may not withstand much scrutiny."

By the end of 1995, Unocal consultant John Haseman, a former military attaché at the US Embassy in Rangoon, added to the chorus in a report to Unocal: "Based on my three years of service in Burma, my continuous contacts in the region since then, and my knowledge of the situation there, my conclusion is that egregious human rights violations have occurred, and are occurring now, in southern Burma," he told Unocal. "The most common are forced relocation without compensation of families from land near/along the pipeline route; forced labor to work on infrastructure projects supporting the pipeline...and imprisonment and/or execution by the army of those opposing such actions"—exactly the core charges of the plaintiffs. "Unocal," Haseman continues, "by seeming to have accepted [the Burmese military's] version of events, appears at best naive and at worst a willing partner in the situation."

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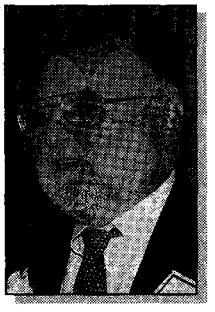

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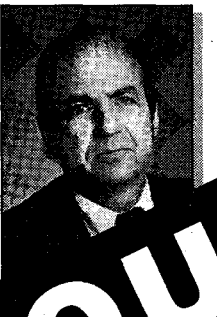

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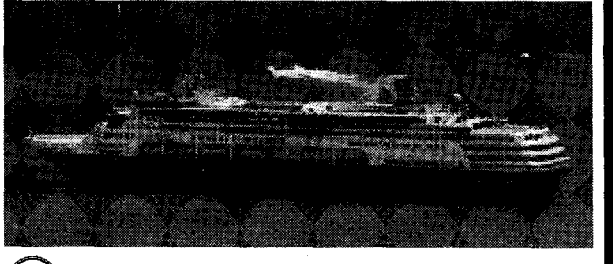

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Unocal nonetheless adamantly maintains that no abuses occurred. In June 2002 the company released a statement saying that the pipeline "was constructed and is being operated according to high ethical standards and modern business practices," and that despite "the challenges" of investing in a country "ruled by an authoritarian military government," it is "confident that no human rights abuses have occurred in the construction or operation of the pipeline." Even if some abuses did occur, says Daniel Petrocelli, the lead lawyer defending Unocal, "no Unocal person participated in any of the alleged wrongdoing. Unocal has no control over the Myanmar military."

With the pipeline now completed and producing profits for Unocal, the company insists that the project benefits Burma. The pipeline is currently producing 700 million cubic feet of gas per day, well above early projections of 525 million, according to Unocal spokesman Barry Lane, who says the project is "exceeding our investment objectives." After a large group of shareholders asked Unocal in May to reconsider its continued involvement there, Unocal chief executive Charles Williamson maintained that the company would not withdraw from the project.

Lane calls the project "a good investment for the company, and a good investment for the people of Myanmar. Our disappointment is that there aren't a hundred such projects in the country." Unocal says that because of its project, infant mortality in the region is down; school attendance is up and close to 600 people have pipeline-related jobs. The company does not calculate how many farmers and fishermen lost their livelihoods as a result of the project's construction.

The June 17 arguments will determine whether Unocal's claims will ever be tested at trial. If the federal court affirms its earlier decision, it will be a major victory not only for the villagers, but for the hundreds of victims in other countries waiting for their day in court. But even if they lose this round, the Burmese villagers have a chance through a second case, filed under state law in Los Angeles. Despite repeated maneuvers to delay by Unocal's lawyers, that trial is now set to start in July.

To Maung, it's about much more than a court verdict. "When I told the villagers that we could sue Unocal, they thought I was crazy," he says. "We're trying to say that corporations can't just come in and do what they want. They have to answer to the law."

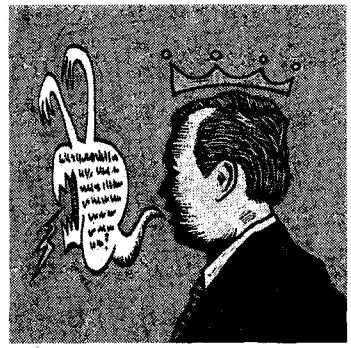
Unocal is still hoping for a way out. Last August, it asked the State Department to intervene, claiming that a trial might interfere with US foreign relations. The company was inspired by a case pending against Exxon Mobil for alleged human rights violations in connection with its operations in Indonesia. There, the State Department asked the federal judge to dismiss the lawsuit on the grounds that it would interfere with the US war on terrorism. But that's a harder case to make with Burma. In 1997, the United States imposed sanctions against Burma, and the State Department's latest reports state that "the government of Burma severely abuses the human rights of its citizens" and has "severe and pervasive forced labor problems." It remains to be seen whether Unocal can make a credible case that despite more than a decade of documented evidence to that effect, it had no idea that its business partner was doing anything wrong—and that in any event, a corporation can't be held responsible. ■

BUSH USES WELL-KNOWN LINGUISTIC TECHNIQUES TO MAKE CITIZENS FEEL DEPENDENT.

A Nation of Victims

RENANA BROOKS

George W. Bush is generally regarded as a mangler of the English language. What is overlooked is his mastery of emotional language—especially negatively charged emotional language—as a political tool. Take a closer look at his speeches and public utterances, and his political success turns out to be no surprise. It is the predictable result of the intentional use of language to dominate others.



RYAN INZANA

President Bush, like many dominant personality types, uses dependency-creating language. He employs language of contempt and intimidation to shame others into submission and desperate admiration. While we tend to think of the dominator as using physical force, in fact most dominators use verbal abuse to control others. Abusive language has been a major theme of psychological researchers on marital problems, such as John Gottman, and of philosophers and theologians, such as Josef Pieper. But little has been said about the key role it has come to play in political discourse, and in such "hot media" as talk radio and television.

Bush uses several dominating linguistic techniques to induce surrender to his will. The first is *empty language*. This term refers to broad statements that are so abstract and mean so little that they are virtually impossible to oppose. Empty language is the emotional equivalent of empty calories. Just as we seldom question the content of potato chips while enjoying their pleasurable taste, recipients of empty language are usually distracted from examining the content of what they are hearing. Dominators use empty language to conceal faulty generalizations; to ridicule viable alternatives; to attribute negative motivations to others, thus making them appear contemptible; and to rename and "reframe" opposing viewpoints.

Renana Brooks, PhD, is a clinical psychologist practicing in Washington, DC. She heads the Sommet Institute for the Study of Power and Persuasion (www.sommetinstitute.org) and is completing a book on the virtue myth and the conservative culture of domination.

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Bush's 2003 State of the Union speech contained thirty-nine examples of empty language. He used it to reduce complex problems to images that left the listener relieved that George W. Bush was in charge. Rather than explaining the relationship between malpractice insurance and skyrocketing healthcare costs, Bush summed up: "No one has ever been healed by a frivolous lawsuit." The multiple fiscal and monetary policy tools that can be used to stimulate an economy were downsized to: "The best and fairest way to make sure Americans have that money is not to tax it away in the first place." The controversial plan to wage another war on Iraq was simplified to: "We will answer every danger and every enemy that threatens the American people." In an earlier study, I found that in the 2000 presidential debates Bush used at least four times as many phrases containing empty language as Carter, Reagan, Clinton, Bush Senior or Gore had used in their debates.

Another of Bush's dominant-language techniques is *personalization*. By personalization I mean localizing the attention of the listener on the speaker's personality. Bush projects himself as the only person capable of producing results. In his post-9/11 speech to Congress he said, "I will not forget this wound to our country or those who inflicted it. I will not yield; I will not rest; I will not relent in waging this struggle for freedom and security for the American people." He substitutes his determination for that of the nation's. In the 2003 State of the Union speech he vowed, "I will defend the freedom and security of the American people." Contrast Bush's "I will not yield" etc. with John F. Kennedy's "Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country."

Bush is a master at inducing learned helplessness in the electorate; his language makes people feel they cannot solve their problems.

The word "you" rarely appears in Bush's speeches. Instead, there are numerous statements referring to himself or his personal characteristics—folksiness, confidence, righteous anger or determination—as the answer to the problems of the country. Even when Bush uses "we," as he did many times in the State of the Union speech, he does it in a way that focuses attention on himself. For example, he stated: "Once again, we are called to defend the safety of our people, and the hopes of all mankind. And we accept this responsibility."

In an article in the January 16 *New York Review of Books*, Joan Didion highlighted Bush's high degree of personalization and contempt for argumentation in presenting his case for going to war in Iraq. As Didion writes: "'I made up my mind,' he had said in April, 'that Saddam needs to go.' This was one of many curious, almost petulant statements offered in lieu of actually presenting a case. *I've made up my mind, I've said in speech after speech, I've made myself clear*. The repeated statements became their own reason."

Poll after poll demonstrates that Bush's political agenda is out of step with most Americans' core beliefs. Yet the public, their electoral resistance broken down by empty language and persuaded by personalization, is susceptible to Bush's most frequently used linguistic technique: *negative framework*. A negative framework is a pessimistic image of the world. Bush creates and maintains negative frameworks in his listeners' minds with a number of linguistic techniques borrowed from advertising and hypnosis to instill the image of a dark and evil world around us. Catastrophic words and phrases are repeatedly drilled into the listener's head until the opposition feels such a high level of anxiety that it appears pointless to do anything other than cower.

Psychologist Martin Seligman, in his extensive studies of "learned helplessness," showed that people's motivation to respond to outside threats and problems is undermined by a belief that they have no control over their environment. Learned helplessness is exacerbated by beliefs that problems caused by negative events are permanent; and when the underlying causes are perceived to apply to many other events, the condition becomes pervasive and paralyzing.

Bush is a master at inducing learned helplessness in the electorate. He uses pessimistic language that creates fear and disables people from feeling they can solve their problems. In his September 20, 2001, speech to Congress on the 9/11 attacks, he chose to increase people's sense of vulnerability: "Americans should not expect one battle, but a lengthy campaign, unlike any other we have ever seen.... I ask you to live your lives, and hug your children. I know many citizens have fears tonight.... Be calm and resolute, even in the face of a continuing threat." (Subsequent terror alerts by the FBI, CIA and Department of Homeland Security have maintained and expanded this fear of unknown, sinister enemies.)

Contrast this rhetoric with Franklin Roosevelt's speech delivered the day after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. He said: "No matter how long it may take us to overcome this premeditated invasion, the American people in their righteous might will win through to absolute victory.... There is no blinking at the fact that our people, our territory and our interests are in grave danger. With confidence in our armed forces—with the unbounding determination of our people—we will gain the inevitable triumph—so help us God." Roosevelt focuses on an optimistic future rather than an ongoing threat to Americans' personal survival.

All political leaders must define the present threats and problems faced by the country before describing their approach to a solution, but the ratio of negative to optimistic statements in Bush's speeches and policy declarations is much higher, more pervasive and more long-lasting than that of any other President. Let's compare "crisis" speeches by Bush and Ronald Reagan, the President with whom he most identifies himself. In Reagan's October 27, 1983, televised address to the nation on the bombing of the US Marine barracks in Beirut, he used nineteen images of crisis and twenty-one images of optimism, evenly balancing optimistic and negative depictions. He limited his evaluation of the problems to the past and present tense, saying only that "with patience and firmness we can bring peace to that strife-torn region—and make our own lives more secure." George W. Bush's October 7, 2002, major policy speech on Iraq, on the other hand, began with forty-four consecutive statements referring to the crisis and citing a multitude of possible catastrophic repercussions. The vast majority of these statements (for example: "Some ask how urgent this danger is to America and the world.

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The danger is already significant, and it only grows worse with time"; "Iraq could decide on any given day to provide a biological or chemical weapon to a terrorist group or individual terrorists") imply that the crisis will last into the indeterminate future. There is also no specific plan of action. The absence of plans is typical of a negative framework, and leaves the listener without hope that the crisis will ever end. Contrast this with Reagan, who, a third of the way into his explanation of the crisis in Lebanon, asked the following: "Where do we go from here? What can we do now to help Lebanon gain greater stability so that our Marines can come home? Well, I believe we can take three steps now that will make a difference."

To create a dependency dynamic between him and the electorate, Bush describes the nation as being in a perpetual state of crisis and then attempts to convince the electorate that it is powerless and that he is the only one with the strength to deal with it. He attempts to persuade people they must transfer power to him, thus crushing the power of the citizen, the Congress, the Democratic Party, even constitutional liberties, to concentrate all power in the imperial presidency and the Republican Party.

Bush's political opponents are caught in a fantasy that they can win against him simply by proving the superiority of their ideas. However, people do not support Bush for the power of his ideas, but out of the despair and desperation in their hearts. Whenever people are in the grip of a desperate dependency, they won't respond to rational criticisms of the people they are dependent on. They will respond to plausible and forceful statements and alternatives that put the American electorate back in touch with their core optimism. Bush's opponents must combat his dark imagery with hope and restore American vigor and optimism in the coming years. They should heed the example of Reagan, who used optimism against Carter and the "national malaise"; Franklin Roosevelt, who used it against Hoover and the pessimism induced by the Depression ("the only thing we have to fear is fear itself"); and Clinton (the "Man from Hope"), who used positive language against the senior Bush's lack of vision. This is the linguistic prescription for those who wish to retire Bush in 2004. ■

LETTERS
CONTINUED

(Continued From Page 2)

charges of disloyalty to try to silence dissent:

"What is this new loyalty? It is, above all, conformity. It is the uncritical and unquestioning acceptance of America as it is.... The concept of loyalty as conformity is a false one. It is narrow and restrictive, denies freedom of thought and of conscience.... What do men know of loyalty who make a mockery of the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights?" ERIC FONER

MOBY, MOBY, MOBY!

Des Moines

■ I noted the letter to the editor dealing with your internal advertising and who appears therein ["Letters," June 2] and congratulating you on the inclusion of Janeane Garofalo (whoever she is) in your ad in the April 28 issue. Your editors' response referred the writer to page 28, and promised (presumably) even bigger and better endorsements to come. So I turned to page 28—and gazed upon "Moby." Moby (whoever you are), if you're left cold by Dubya's vision of America (whatever the hell that is), I'm happy to see you endorsing *The Nation*. And I look forward to all your silver-hair-impaired soulmates gracing future editions. Some of us oldsters welcome the new blood. RON NATH

JUDGES WHO HATE AMERICA

Washington, DC

■ Jack Newfield is correct that the battles now raging over the Bush Administration's judicial appointments are about "abortion, affirmative action, civil liberties [and] equal rights" ["The Judiciary Wars," June 2]. But they are also about other "things that matter," particularly the ability of the government to protect the nation's environment and natural resources.

Appointing activist judges in the mold of Antonin Scalia and Clarence Thomas will greatly restrict the ability of the federal government to police polluters, conserve wildlife and safeguard the public health. Indeed, recent rulings by such federal jurists have already decimated the Clean Water Act—resulting in the loss of millions of acres of wetlands throughout the country—weakened the Endangered Species Act and erected new obstacles to citizen enforcement of environmental and open government laws. Those who seek to challenge Bush's professed policy of stacking the courts with extreme right-wing ideologues must educate the public that the future of the environment itself is at stake in this battle.

ERIC R. GLITZENSTEIN

McCARTHYISM IN THE YEAR 2003

Los Angeles

■ Now that we're celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of McCarthyism [Victor Navasky, "McCarthy's Secret Show," May 26], it should be remembered that Joe McCarthy's technique was character assassination. If you dared to disagree with him, you were branded "un-American." Well, when Senator Robert Byrd questioned the need for George W. Bush to give a political speech aboard an aircraft carrier at taxpayers' expense, White House mouthpiece Ari Fleischer called the senator "unpatriotic." And when Representative Henry Waxman questioned the contractual goodies being handed out by the Administration, Fleischer said, "Henry Waxman never met a Republican he didn't want to investigate." These personal attacks, so typical of McCarthy, lie ill in the mouth of a spokesman for a President who wants to be re-elected.

BRUCE TOOR

'NOW THEY TELL US'

San Anselmo, Calif.

■ David Corn titles his May 19 report on Bush's rush-to-war falsehoods "Now They Tell Us." I suggest that the title applies to the entire Bush program, going back to the 2000 campaign, when he referred to himself as a compassionate conservative, a uniter not a divider, who would practice humility in foreign policy.

"Oh, did we forget to tell you," Bush or his other unelected wranglers might say today, "that our foreign policy is driven by a radical neoconservative doctrine that calls for US military domination—including of space—as the one true way to peace? That our concept of national unity basically means uniting all Americans, except those of our own social class, in poverty and downsized expectations? *Now* they tell us.

Shortly after the election, some publications, among them *The Nation*, suggested that Bush might actually do what he said he would and don the cloak of humility, given his ascent under such questionable circumstances. He would concede that he had no mandate and therefore would exercise restraint in his governance. Obviously, that was never his intent. It is testimony to the Bush propaganda machine that his party is able to foist this extreme agenda onto people who believed they were voting for something quite different. WILLIAM MILLER

Lakebay, Wash.

■ When I first saw your "Now They Tell Us" cover photo I felt there was something strange about it: Ten men sit around a conference table. The places all have nameplates—so these folks need, in that small a group, a reminder of who they're talking to. But the nameplates are two-sided! Do they also need a reminder of their own identities? MICHAEL DONN

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Stop the Presses

(Continued From Page 9)

with his duties on the media beat of the *Washington Post*—only because of that paper's "insular culture." Nowhere else in respectable journalism is a beat reporter invited to take a paycheck from the people about whom he reports.

So while the clucking over the *Times* is understandable, much of it is unseemly, misplaced and, frankly, deeply suspect. The unapologetic (if inconsistent) liberalism of the *Times* editorial page and the paper's decision to publish two of the most tough-minded pundits in the mainstream media, Paul Krugman and Frank Rich, is the actual target of much of the incoming fire. The right's rap on the *Times* is not that its editorial pages are too liberal—that they can tolerate. It's that its news pages are. Observe the emblematic sleight of hand here by the far-right *Wall Street Journal* editors: "As readers of the *Times*, however, our view is that what we have been seeing on its front page in recent years is less straightforward reporting and more advocacy journalism. In this sense, the scandal over Jayson Blair's fabrications is symptomatic of a broader credibility problem that won't vanish merely because Mr. Raines does."

Note the logical incongruity: How, exactly, are Jayson Blair's fabrications symptomatic of advocacy journalism? Just what was Blair "advocating," besides himself? The *Journal* editors do not, indeed cannot, say. But no matter; a sword is a sword and Blair, Bragg, Boyd and Raines provided a handy one. The fact is that liberals could fill books with complaints about the *Times*'s willingness to compromise its highest journalistic standards in pursuit of stories that gladden conservative hearts. For those who deem the *Times* news pages to be in league with the left—even loosely defined—how to explain the following:

§ The extreme sympathy offered Ken Starr in his Torquemada-like pursuit of Bill Clinton, not only on Raines's editorial page but up to and including a willingness to misguide its readers in the news pages, by reporting that Starr spokesman Charles Bakaly had "declined to discuss" the investigation with the *Times*, when Judge Norma Johnson later deduced that he had been "the direct source, or at least a confirming source," for much of the information found in the *Times* articles.

§ The hysterical reporting on Wen Ho Lee, which, its own editors admitted, "adopted the sense of alarm that was contained in official reports."

§ The assignment of the love-struck Frank Bruni to cover George W. Bush during campaign 2000 (and his early presidency), paired with Katharine Seelye's hostile coverage of Al Gore.

§ More recently, the simmering scandal following Judith Miller's reporting on the Iraq war. Miller has consistently beaten the WMD drum for the Administration, although her pro-Administration scoops always evaporate into thin air. The *Times* went out on a journalistic limb for Miller when, in a front-page story, it allowed her to report the belief of an unnamed "Iraqi scientist," to whom she'd never spoken, who corroborated the Administration view—in a story that the Pentagon vetted before publication. This story never panned out either, as we all know, but there have been no corrections and no apologies. Meanwhile, we learn from a series of purloined e-mails printed in the *Washington Post* that Miller's source for "most of the front page exclusives on WMD to our paper," in the words of Miller's e-mail, was none other than Iraqi National Congress leader Ahmed Chalabi, the neocons' candidate for Big Man on (the Iraqi) Campus. (Patrick Tyler, another Raines crony, even hired Chalabi's niece, Sarah Khalil, to channel supplies to reporters in Iraq.)

The point here is not that the *Times* is a tool of the right rather than the left. It is a tool too often of power, and power in this country resides with the right. But the paper is unquestionably less obeisant to the extremist forces ensconced in the White House and dominating much of the media than just about any other major journalistic institution we have left. The *Washington Post* and the *Times* are two of the last great family-controlled media corporations, but the former, in recent years, has become so embedded in the city's ruling establishment that one can no longer tell where official pronouncements end and its editorial pages begin. (During the brief Harken Oil flap of summer 2002, for instance, the *Post* editorial page warned that Congress should not let Harken "distract" members from corporate reform. But Congress, as any freshman poli-sci text will explain, is set up to discuss more than one issue at a time. That's why it has committees. What the editors were really saying is, Leave Bush alone, everyone—he's our guy.)

The news pages of the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, *Newsday* and others offer up some first-rate enterprising reporting on those in power, but none of them enjoy the professional influence that the *Times* does to decide what's news. The rest of the pack—in thrall to ratings and corporate profit targets—rarely care enough to ask themselves, as Harold Evans has noted, whether they are even in the journalism business anymore. For CBSNBCABCAOLCNNMSNBCFOX, freedom really is just another word for nothing left to lose.

And here we reach the heart of the conservative complaint about the *Times*: not the crusaders in its editorial pages or even the alleged advocacy of its news pages but its genuine editorial independence. For all its many flaws, the *Times* is still driven by a dedication to the principles of journalism. When, last year, the paper reported on dissension among the military, the Republican establishment and Congressional conservatives over Bush's willingness to rush this country into war (based on what we now know to have been false premises), the *Times* was not enlisting in the antiwar movement, as the Krauthammers, Kristols and Murdoch minions moaned. It was, almost alone in America, reporting the news.

Powerful people and institutions have a strong self-interest in resisting journalistic inspection and the public accountability it can inspire. But their resistance weakens the democratic bond between the powerful and the powerless that can prevent unchecked corruption where it matters most. Irresponsible attacks by the right on just about all tough-minded, independent reporting come at the cost of the very information citizens need to understand the political, social and economic context of their world. The ability of the *Times* to report honestly on the forces that govern our lives—and, by doing so, to help set the agenda for the rest of the media—is one of the few institutional obstacles in the path of those who misuse their power. And that's why, for all its flaws, the *Times* must be defended. We have, alas, seen the alternative. ■

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COMMENT

(Continued From Page 6)

its actions illegal. A district court has held its secret arrests illegal; two district courts and a court of appeals held its secret immigration hearings unconstitutional; and two district courts have ruled unconstitutional its policy of keeping immigrants locked up even after immigration judges order their release. Only one court, a divided court of appeals, has ruled in the government's favor, upholding the closure of immigration hearings to the press; the government avoided Supreme Court review of that policy only by informing the Court that it was abandoning it. A substantial class-action challenge, brought by the Center for Constitutional Rights, to the policy of keeping immigrants locked up long after their cases have been resolved is pending in federal court in Brooklyn.

In short, the Justice Department is as careless about the truth regarding the legality of its own actions as it was careless about the terrorist connections of its detainees. And it's only going to get worse. Attorney General Ashcroft used the occasion of his testimony before Congress shortly after the release of the Inspector General's report to ask for even more sweeping powers, including more death penalties, broader imposition of guilt-by-association for supporting blacklisted groups, and expanded preventive detention authority, this time applied to citizens. But why should Congress give more power to a man who has not only abused the power he already wields but cannot even acknowledge his own wrongdoing?

DAVID COLE

David Cole (cole@law.georgetown.edu), Nation *legal affairs correspondent, is the author of the forthcoming* Enemy Aliens: Double Standards and Constitutional Freedoms in the War on Terrorism *(New Press).*

Chipping Away at Roe

Congress has once again passed a bill banning "partial-birth abortion." It's not the first time. President Clinton vetoed similar bans in 1996 and 1997. In 2000 the Supreme Court struck down a similar law passed in Nebraska, in *Stenberg v. Carhart*. Now, however, antiabortion forces have struck paydirt—because this President will sign it.

Many see passage of the bill as a minor defeat, prohibiting the use of a single procedure that many view as troubling. In fact, it marks at least a temporary win in a right-wing disinformation strategy. Just as the WMD mantra was used to short-circuit debate over the "pre-emptive" war, so too has "partial-birth abortion" been used to divert attention from an eight-year campaign to render *Roe* hollow.

The term "partial-birth abortion" is invented and nonsensical, with no medical meaning. Rather than banning only abortions performed late in pregnancy using one specific method—dilation and extraction—as proponents claim, the bill, because its language is so broad, would outlaw many abortion procedures performed throughout the second trimester, long before fetal viability.

Many physicians who provide abortions brave picketers, harassment, violence and even death threats. Now Congress has tacked on the risk of two years in prison, just like the bad old days before *Roe*. Already, nearly 90 percent of US counties lack a single abortion provider. This bill could aggravate this severe dearth and further reduce abortion access.

The *Roe* decision—as reaffirmed by the Supreme Court in *Carhart*—laid out a framework in which a woman and her doctor decide about abortion based on her right to privacy and bodily integrity, with the state empowered to block abortions only after fetal viability and only if doing so would not compromise the woman's life or health. Protection of the woman's health was defined as primary, at all stages of her pregnancy. With this bill, Congress restricts a woman's medical options, endangering her health, overriding her doctor's judgment and defying the fundamental precepts of *Roe*.

Congress is also defying the constitutional system of separation of powers. Since 1995 thirty-one states have enacted bans on "partial-birth abortion." Because the broad language criminalizes commonly used safe procedures and thus interferes with a woman's right to choose, and because of the lack of a health exception, the bans were overturned in twenty-one states and struck down by the Supreme Court in *Carhart*. The current bill repeats these errors in open disregard for that decision, presumably in anticipation that new appointments will reverse the Court's five-to-four split, in the anti-*Roe* direction.

The media have played along with the right on this issue, adopting the propagandistic term "partial-birth abortion" and contributing to the misapprehension that the bill would ban only a single procedure. Polls indicate that Americans have indeed been misinformed and that when presented with the facts, they want doctors to be able to provide the best care to women. In the three states where bans landed on the ballot, voters rejected them.

Too many in organized medicine decided that getting Congressional support for liability protections was their top priority and thus were unwilling to come out in front to oppose this deceptive bill. Yet the Partial-Birth Abortion Ban Act of 2003 so violates the doctor-patient relationship, respect for science and the value of women's lives and health that organized medicine should fight hard against this threat. Civil liberties groups realized early on that this maneuvering was not solely about abortion but was one more example of the right's efforts to circumvent the democratic process. Other sectors must appreciate the scale of this assault.

WENDY CHAVKIN

Wendy Chavkin, MD, MPH, is professor of public health and obstetrics-gynecology at Columbia's Mailman School of Public Health and chair of Physicians for Reproductive Choice and Health.

THIS WEEK ON THE WEB: Recent studies show that the cost of the death penalty exceeds the cost of life sentences without parole by more than 30 percent—a strong financial, as well as moral and political, argument for an end to capital punishment (see June's Death Row Roll Call for more). Also read letters on the Jessica Lynch media scandal, Matt Bivens's daily survey of Administration outrages and weblogs by Katrina vanden Heuvel, David Corn, John Nichols and Peter Rothberg.

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BOOKS & THE ARTS

The Last Mogul

THOMAS SCHATZ

WHEN HOLLYWOOD HAD A KING: The Reign of Lew Wasserman, Who Leveraged Talent Into Power and Influence.
By Connie Bruck.
Random House. 512 pp. $29.95.

Lew Wasserman, who died last summer at 89, was not only the most powerful and influential man in Hollywood over the past half-century but also the most enigmatic. Like his mentor Jules Stein, Wasserman shunned publicity, rarely spoke to the press, put almost nothing in writing and came to understand that the cult of mystery and suspicion around him—and his company, MCA-Universal—was ultimately an asset. Wasserman maintained his silence after being forced out as MCA board chairman in 1995 (at 82), despite the frequent entreaties to go on record with his own account of MCA's remarkable history and his role as chief architect of the New Hollywood. And even after the 1998 hatchet job by journalist Dennis McDougal in *The Last Mogul: Lew Wasserman, MCA, and the Hidden History of Hollywood*, Wasserman declined to bow out with a self-serving (or self-defensive) mogul memoir.

Now comes Connie Bruck, a longtime staff writer for *The New Yorker* and author of two very good corporate biographies: *The Predator's Ball*, on junk-bond king Michael Milken, and *Master of the Game*, on Steve Ross and the epochal Time Warner merger. Bruck began writing about Wasserman after the Seagram buyout, and was sufficiently intrigued to start a book-length project just as McDougal's *The Last Mogul* appeared. McDougal's account essentially rehashed Dan Moldea's 1986 book, *Dark Victory: Reagan, MCA, and the Mob*, assigning Wasserman's and MCA's success not only to the ruthless exercise of power but also to longstanding alliances with politicians like Ronald Reagan and reputed mobsters like Sidney Korshak. Bruck has a different story to tell, one that jibes far better with the industry's more recent view of Wasserman, which has evolved from fear and distrust to grudging respect and, in some circles, outright deification.

Bruck's account is *When Hollywood Had a King: The Reign of Lew Wasserman, Who Leveraged Talent Into Power and Influence*, and the title alone, cumbersome though it is, indicates her more sanguine view of Wasserman. Bruck scarcely ignores the darker side of his "power and influence," but the overall effect of her book is to both deepen and effectively counter the earlier versions of the Wasserman-MCA saga. And rather than portray Wasserman as the last of the studio moguls, Bruck sees him as an altogether original figure in Hollywood annals. By the 1960s, writes Bruck, Wasserman had assumed "a new, imperial role of his design. There had never been one individual who spoke for the industry, and who navigated its course singlehandedly." For the next three decades, Wasserman "wielded authority over all of Hollywood"—and not as a power-hungry, avaricious tyrant but as a benevolent dictator.

Hollywood's view of Wasserman has evolved from fear and distrust to grudging respect and, in some circles, outright deification.

Bruck ably supports this thesis in her thorough, balanced and insightful biography, which is likely to stand as the definitive account of Wasserman's remarkable career, due not only to the quality of her reportage but also her exceptional sources. Most uncharacteristically, Wasserman submitted to a series of interviews with Bruck. Though he initially agreed only to discuss MCA founder and his longtime mentor, Jules Stein, he eventually began talking about his own life and career as well. Bruck admits in her introduction that "much of what he said

Thomas Schatz, a professor of film studies at the University of Texas, is the author of The Genius of the System *(Metropolitan). He is currently working on a book about MCA-Universal and the New Hollywood, with Thom Mount, former president of Universal Pictures.*

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had a distinctly prerecorded quality," but the fact is that she got closer to the famously reticent Wasserman than any other journalist or biographer, which adds immensely to the project. Bruck also gained access to Stein's own unpublished memoirs, "as told to" Murray Schumach of the *New York Times*—yet another tantalizing bit of arcane MCA lore whose existence was known to Hollywood insiders, and whose unpublished status only fueled the mystery surrounding Stein, Wasserman and MCA.

The Wasserman-MCA story is largely the Jules Caesar Stein story as well, and thus a substantial portion of *When Hollywood Had a King* focuses squarely on the ophthalmologist whose interest in music—and making money—led to the creation of the Music Corporation of America. Stein launched MCA in 1924 as a band-booking agency in Jazz Age Chicago, and within a decade built it into a nationwide powerhouse. A brilliant and innovative businessman, Stein either invented or perfected the one-night stand, "exclusive" contracts with talent buyers, product tie-ins and, perhaps most important, "packaging," which provided buyers with a full season's bookings while giving MCA a packaging fee on top of its commissions, as well as a taste of actual production.

Stein understood power, and dealt astutely with the musicians' unions, with the new medium of commercial radio and, while operating out of Chicago during Prohibition, with the mob. During the 1930s he developed a close working relationship with Sidney Korshak, a rising mob lawyer who helped Stein navigate the treacherous waters of labor relations—and who would continue to help MCA on the labor front for decades. Stein was also a man of cultivated taste and considerable intellect. His obsession with antiques furnished MCA's far-flung executive offices for a half-century, and his fascination with tax law and the stock market proved vital to MCA's rapid growth into an amalgam of interlocking companies.

By the mid-1930s, MCA was by far the largest and most powerful booking and talent agency in the music business, whose client list (itself a closely guarded secret) reportedly included some two-thirds of the nation's top bands. In 1936, Stein made two momentous decisions. One was to move MCA's corporate headquarters to the West Coast and broaden its focus to include the movie industry. The other was to hire Lew Wasserman, a tall, lean 23-year-old publicist from Cleveland who in time would take the company far beyond even Jules Stein's grandiose dreams.

The son of Russian Jewish immigrants, Wasserman went to work out of high school to support his family. He was ambitious, energetic and blessed with a rare combination of street smarts and native intellect that made him a quick study in the agency business. After a stint in MCA's New York office with Sonny Werblin and Swifty Lazar, Wasserman was sent to the West Coast in 1939, and within a year Stein gave him free rein. Working for a cash-rich company in Depression-era Hollywood, in a field overrun with hustlers and "flesh peddlers," Wasserman took Hollywood by storm. He bought out the contracts of top stars like Bette Davis and mid-range stars like Ronald Reagan. More significant, he bought entire agencies, including those of Leland Hayward and Myron Selznick, then Hollywood's top agents. The Hayward buyout in 1945 secured MCA's foothold in Hollywood, as well as Wasserman's. Hayward called him "the best agent I ever saw," and Stein described Wasserman as the "pupil who was surpassing the teacher." Wasserman was surpassing MCA's more senior agents like Werblin and Taft Schreiber as well. In 1946, at age 33 and just ten years after joining the agency, Wasserman was named president of MCA by Stein, who assumed the newly created post of chairman of the board.

While presiding over MCA during its postwar ascent, Wasserman not only dominated the entertainment business; he revolutionized it.

Thus began Wasserman's and MCA's phenomenal postwar ascent. Jules Stein "had set the pattern," Bruck notes, but Wasserman's "appetite for power was far, far greater." MCA's dark-suited minions soon dominated the flow of talent into both the motion picture and nascent television industries even more thoroughly than Stein's troops had dominated "bands and acts." In the process, Wasserman cut deals that revolutionized the entertainment business. He devised capital gains setups for scores of stars and directors, forming independent production companies that gave talent far more income and power than ever before. He negotiated an unprecedented "back-end" deal for James Stewart giving him 50 percent of his films' revenues, which forever revolutionized profit sharing for top stars. And he cut equally extraordinary deals for Alfred Hitchcock's services with both Paramount and CBS that gave the director ownership of his films and his hit TV series, making Hitchcock an entertainment franchise unto himself and the wealthiest filmmaker in Hollywood.

The key to MCA's postwar surge was not film (or music) but television. While the movie studios were struggling and the moguls of old either dismissed or opposed the new medium, Wasserman embraced it. Recognizing television's voracious appetite for talent and programming, he created MCA-Revue to produce "telefilm" series and also, crucially, to buy old movies and TV shows for syndication. The fact that MCA was involved at all in TV production—an obvious conflict of interest for a talent agency—is further evidence of Wasserman's business savvy and agile back-room maneuvering. In 1952, as Hollywood's talent base was flocking to New York, then the center of live video production, Wasserman convinced the Screen Actors Guild (SAG) via its president (and MCA client) Ronald Reagan to grant MCA a "blanket waiver" allowing it to both represent talent and produce TV series. This gave MCA a huge advantage, and by the late 1950s it was the leading supplier of prime-time programming. MCA's syndication operation was equally successful, providing enough ready cash for the 1959 purchase of Universal City, Hollywood's largest studio lot, as a base of operations.

Wasserman then set his sights on Universal Pictures and parent company Decca Records. That and the SAG waiver invited a Justice Department investigation—one of many, notes Bruck, who marvels that "no fewer than eight investigations of MCA by the antitrust division had been aborted since 1941." Wasserman & Co. dodged yet another indictment, agreeing to terms that greatly favored MCA. The government agreed not to prosecute, on the condition that MCA completely dissolve its agency. MCA readily complied, since the agency was generating far less revenue than TV production and syndication, and since that freed MCA to purchase Decca and Universal, thus creating the first modern media conglomerate. Wasserman immediately began upgrading and expanding Universal City, culminating in the construction of the infamous Black Tower, a fifteen-story glass monolith—the tallest building in Hollywood—that announced Wasserman's regime in no uncertain terms.

Universal Television enhanced MCA-Revue's rule of prime-time programming

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via such innovations as the long-form series and the made-for-television movie. Scorned as a "sausage factory" by critics and competitors alike, MCA's TV operation paid the bills during the 1960s as the company struggled to find its way in a movie industry that was sliding into a deep recession. By 1969 MCA was losing money for the first time ever, which left Wasserman vulnerable to an attack that came in the form of the legendary "palace coup"—an event that has been shrouded in mystery for decades, and that Bruck describes in intimate detail. Mounted by longtime MCA rival Taft Schreiber, who deeply resented Wasserman's authority, the coup gained steam only because Stein himself had come to resent Wasserman's post-merger supremacy as well as MCA's quarterly losses. But top executives Sid Sheinberg, Frank Price and Jennings Lang all threatened to leave along with Wasserman if Schreiber took charge, and so Stein relented, publicly reaffirming Wasserman as president and CEO. And in 1973, after a half-century at the helm, Stein himself stepped down and appointed Wasserman his successor, with Sheinberg moving up to the MCA presidency.

"The seventies belonged to Wasserman," writes Bruck. He "presided majestically over a world he had been shaping for decades," thanks to a successful formula "combining inevitably volatile movie production with a stable and highly lucrative TV business." In 1973, Universal's movie fortunes improved dramatically with *American Graffiti* and *The Sting*, and then went into overdrive in 1975 with *Jaws*, a signal event for both the studio and the industry. *Jaws* put *Wunderkind* director Steven Spielberg on the map (it was his second feature) and provided a prototype for the modern Hollywood blockbuster: a high-cost, high-speed, high-concept entertainment machine propelled by a nationwide "saturation" release campaign, which was subsequently milked for every licensing and tie-in dollar possible, including sequels and theme-park rides. *Jaws* was Hollywood's first "summer blockbuster" and the first film to return over $100 million to its distributor—still the measure of a blockbuster hit. Universal kept the momentum going with *Jaws II*, *Smokey and the Bandit*, *Animal House* and *The Deer Hunter*, and by 1980 it ruled the movie industry as thoroughly as it did television. Another MCA success story at the time involved its legendary "studio tour," which dated back to the silent era but had been moribund until Wasserman revived it in the 1960s. By the 1980s it had evolved into a highly successful theme park at Universal City, and MCA was creating new parks in various locations in the United States and abroad.

Wasserman, meanwhile, steadily broadened his influence into the national political and labor arenas. His close relationship with Lyndon Johnson and Ronald Reagan proved crucial, as did his canny utilization of Sidney Korshak. In 1966, Wasserman single-handedly installed LBJ aide Jack Valenti as head of the Motion Picture Association of America, and through Valenti he exercised enormous clout in Hollywood and Washington. Wasserman unilaterally executed many vital labor contracts and guild agreements from the 1960s into the 1980s, working with Valenti to handle the guilds and unions while relying on Korshak to handle the all-important Teamsters. And Wasserman's influence over tax laws and media regulations brought literally billions of dollars into the industry. Bruck is in her element here, tracing Wasserman's central role in brokering an investment tax credit deal for the film studios, and in convincing Reagan to call off the FCC in the one area of media regulation (which prohibited the networks from producing, owning or syndicating entertainment programming) that insured the studios' continued role as TV program suppliers.

When Hollywood Had a King is at its most compelling when tracing these avenues of Wasserman's "power and influence." Among Wasserman's more revealing statements in the book, and one that reveals as much about Bruck's own interests, involves the notion of power. "People misuse the word power," confides Wasserman. "They think it implies an abuse. I don't consider I have power. I have relationships." Bruck clearly concurs, and she delves deeply into Wasserman's relationships with Stein, Johnson, Reagan, Valenti and Korshak; in the process she shrewdly measures Wasserman's style, his personality and how he got things done. Bruck assesses other relationships as well, notably the Stein-Schreiber alliance in the late 1960s, which involved not only the coup but also the company's conservative Republican wing, a crucial factor during the Nixon years. (Taft Schreiber hosted a Nixon fundraiser on the night of the Watergate break-in, which Bruck relates in an amusing aside.)

One key relationship that is not examined quite as effectively, however, is that between Wasserman and Sid Sheinberg—no small matter, considering Sheinberg's role

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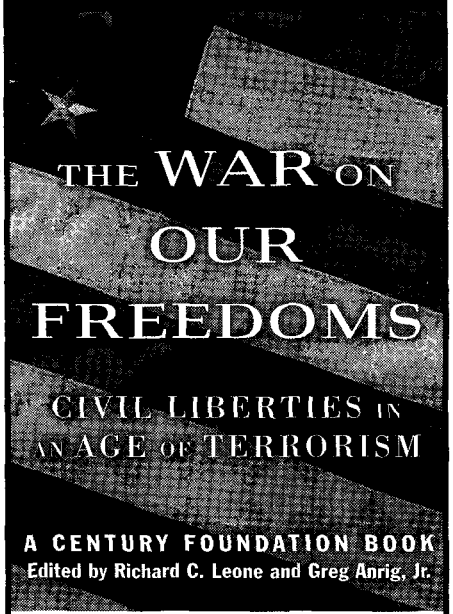
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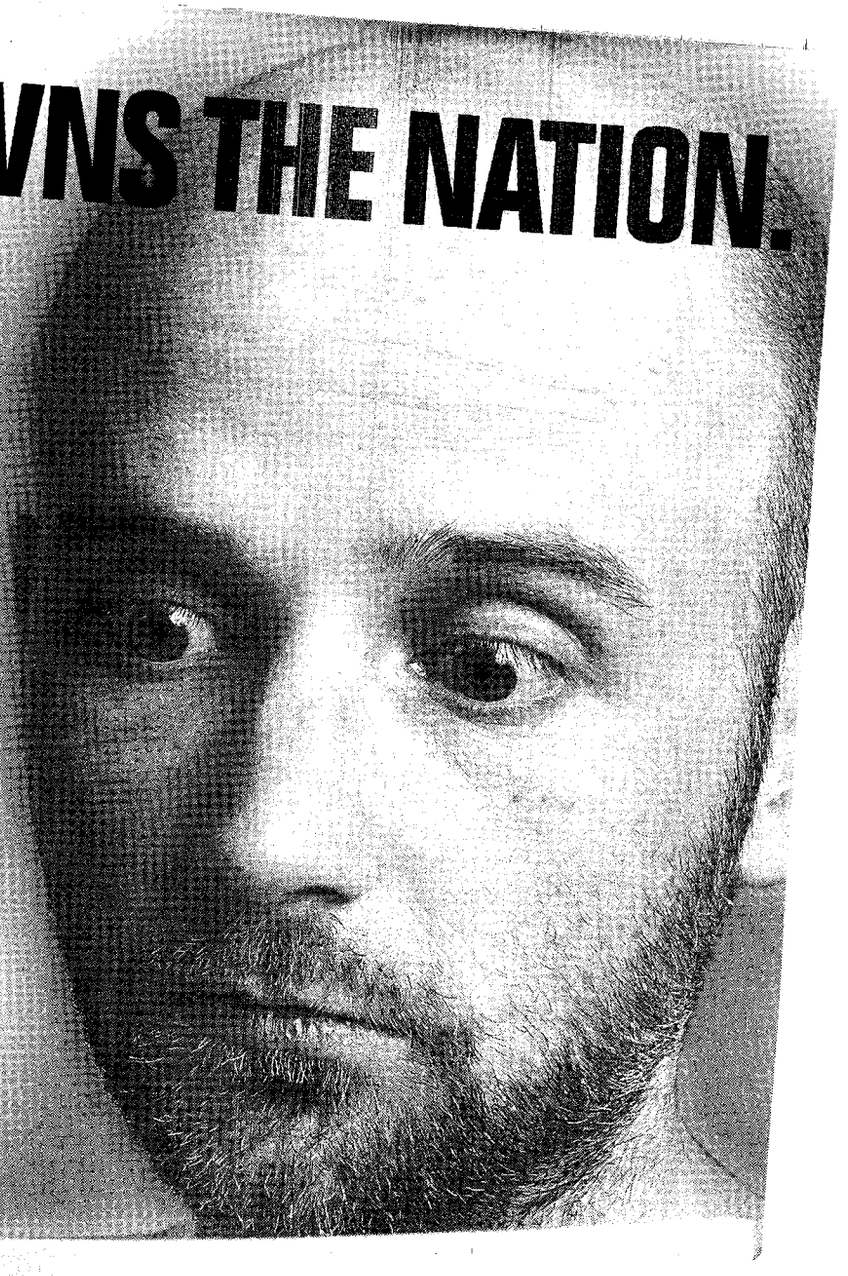

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as president of MCA and his close association with Wasserman from the early 1970s onward. A number of vital initiatives, especially in the burgeoning home-video arena, went awry relatively early in the Wasserman-Sheinberg regime and signaled a downturn in the company's power—but receive rather short shrift in Bruck's account. In the late 1970s, MCA developed a video-disc system (a precursor to DVD), whose failure cost the company tens of millions, and cost it considerable credibility and prestige as well. In a related and equally ill-fated effort, MCA took the lead in a lengthy and costly lawsuit against Sony's Betamax VCR for copyright infringement. As the case worked its way to the Supreme Court in the early 1980s, the VCR became a household necessity in the United States and the source of massive revenues for the studios, rendering MCA's legal challenge a futile and somewhat absurd exercise. Remarkably, Bruck mentions the video-disc failure only in a parenthetical aside, and the Sony-Betamax saga is treated long after the fact, as a minor sidebar in the Matsushita buyout in 1990.

By the time the Sony case was resolved, MCA-Universal was essentially Sheinberg's company and Wasserman, now in his 70s, was becoming noticeably more cautious and conservative. Opportunities for favorable mergers with companies like RCA and Disney were squandered, due largely to Wasserman's insistence that Sheinberg run any merged entity. Rivals like Warner and Fox pursued cable and other new media prospects under Steve Ross and Rupert Murdoch, respectively, while MCA kept its focus on movies and television. "While Murdoch was building an empire and Warner diversified adventurously," writes Bruck, "MCA stuck to its knitting," and its huge competitive advantage steadily slipped away. But as the combined forces of deregulation, conglomeration and globalization transformed Hollywood, Wasserman eventually had to act. In the wake of the 1989 Time-Warner merger and Sony's purchase of Columbia-Tristar, Wasserman agreed to let superagent Mike Ovitz broker MCA's acquisition by the Japanese industrial giant Matsushita, whose VHS home-video system had vanquished Betamax and, like Sony, was looking to Hollywood for a "hardware-software" alliance.

The 1990 Matsushita deal left MCA-Universal intact with Wasserman and Sheinberg in control, but the marriage proved to be disastrous almost from the start. A severe "conflict of cultures" between the new owners and management was exacerbated by the collapse of the Japanese economy, and Wasserman's plans for expansion were repeatedly thwarted by the parent company. Soon the merger was viewed by all involved as less a blessing than a curse, despite a remarkable run of Universal films, including *Cape Fear*, *Apollo 13* and Spielberg's back-to-back 1993 hits, *Jurassic Park* and *Schindler's List*. In 1995 Matsushita cut its losses and sold MCA-Universal to Seagram in another deal engineered by Ovitz, but without Wasserman and Sheinberg's knowledge. New owner Edgar Bronfman Jr. dissolved MCA, cashiered Sheinberg and unceremoniously kicked Wasserman upstairs to "chairman emeritus" status—a title that allowed him to retain his office atop the Black Tower (now the Lew Wasserman Building) but gave him no authority or input into the newly configured "Universal."

Wasserman relished his power, but unlike today's media barons he also cared about his 'product'—talent and filmmaking.

The Seagram deal ended Wasserman's career, although for Bruck it seems to have ended several years before. She devotes only ten pages of *When Hollywood Had a King* to the five-year Matsushita-MCA era—far less than she devotes to the deal itself, in which she contends that Wasserman had "been had" by Ovitz, signaling the effective end of his half-century reign. "Wasserman lived so long that he outlasted his myth," writes Bruck, and so the last decade of his life, and his last years atop MCA, are of little note.

Lew Wasserman outlived the myth of his own sovereignty, perhaps, but not the reality of his long-term influence, even if his vision was realized by a later generation of media barons. The Seagram buyout of MCA coincided with a number of other media deals—Viacom's takeover of Paramount and Blockbuster, for instance, and Disney's purchase of ABC—which endorsed Wasserman's vision of a tightly diversified, vertically and horizontally integrated media conglomerate. Indeed, Wasserman's MCA provided the veritable template, the new paradigm for the blockbuster-driven, synergy-obsessed media giants that now rule the global media landscape. MCA may have been dismantled, but Wasserman's legacy survives in the very nature and structure of the New Hollywood.

Thus the tough questions at the end of Wasserman's career are scarcely about mob ties and power plays—which seem increasingly penny ante in this post-Enron world. The tougher questions involve a cartel of media conglomerates that evolved in MCA-Universal's image, dedicated to turning out soulless replicas of *Jaws* and *Jurassic Park*. And as the media giants grow richer and more powerful, despite their cultural and artistic bankruptcy, the toughest question of all, at least from my viewpoint, is simply: What hath Wasserman wrought?

That question is never posed in *When Hollywood Had a King*, not even in the funeral-cum-reflection that closes the book. This is somewhat puzzling in light of Bruck's concerns with Wasserman's "power and influence." Then again, her fascination with Wasserman has less to do with cultural production and actual products—movies and TV programs, music and theme-park rides—than with the political economy of Hollywood at a "higher" level, particularly as it relates to Wall Street and Washington. In the tradition of Saul Steinberg's legendary *New Yorker* cover that maps out the world as seen from 9th Avenue, Bruck's view extends from the boardrooms and brokerage firms of Manhattan westward to the Potomac, but beyond Washington it grows more vague and indistinct. Remarkably, she scarcely ventures inside MCA-Universal itself and never even mentions many of its most vital films, from *Spartacus* and *The Birds* at the time of the merger to *Jurassic Park* and *Schindler's List* on the eve of MCA's demise.

Wasserman's role in the making of these films, as well as their impact on the industry and on media culture, are simply not on Bruck's agenda, a significant oversight, since Wasserman was in many ways a throwback to the hands-on, in-the-trenches studio bosses of old. McDougal's muckraking aside, his title was on target; Wasserman really was "the last mogul" in the mold of Jack Warner and Darryl Zanuck. He understood power and cultivated relationships, yes, but he was also fiercely invested in talent, filmmaking and "product"—which set him utterly apart from the new breed of media barons.

A deeper concern involves Bruck's inability, despite her direct access to Wasserman, to get beyond his formidable defenses. I too had the opportunity to talk with Wasserman in his last years and came away with the same sense that his well-worn anecdotes had been carefully edited to suit his

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own and his company's needs. Interestingly enough, Bruck closes her book with a similar disclaimer to the one in her introduction mentioned above. In a telling coda, Bruck wonders whether Wasserman's "famous stories" may have been "part of the elaborate facade Wasserman constructed, which kept others from glimpsing what was within and projected what he chose." One has to wonder whether Bruck herself has failed to penetrate that facade.

In fact, little if any of the crucial information in her account comes from Wasserman and is pieced together by Bruck herself through other interviews and her arduous research. These efforts do pay off, however, producing an absorbing chronicle of both a man and a company that adds immeasurably to our understanding of both. And thus any concerns about Bruck's getting "inside" either the studio operations or the man himself are easily offset by her overall achievement. *When Hollywood Had a King* provides a rich and even-handed view of Lew Wasserman, doing justice both literally and figuratively to the most recent, if not the last, of the Hollywood giants. ■

The Critical Imagination

BRIAN MORTON

THE BOOK AGAINST GOD. By James Wood. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. 257 pp. $24.

James Wood, the ferociously intelligent critic whose reviews appear regularly in *The New Republic* and the *London Review of Books*, has single-handedly done a great deal to improve the literary atmosphere in the past few years. With their extraordinary intensity, Wood's literary essays are like nothing else being written today; he seems to be a man who couldn't live without literature, and for many of us, his example has been inspiring.

Wood is one of those rare critics whose discernment is so strong that he helps us to become better readers of fiction. More than that: He's one of those rare writers who can enrich one's own engagement with life. In a brilliant appreciation of Saul Bellow, for example, Wood showed how Bellow is alone among contemporary writers in his power to make the reader see—and after reading Wood's demonstration of where Bellow's greatness lies, one came away feeling that one's own ability to see had been magnified.

Most book reviews are just plot summaries with a few adjectives thrown in; Wood is rare among contemporary reviewers in that he has a considered idea of what a good novel should be, and he's confident enough to make his premises clear. Wood believes that the special magic of fiction lies in the writer's ability to create "characters out of nothing"—and when he finds fault with a novel it's often because he believes that the novelist has avoided the hard work of trying to bring fully imagined characters to the page. Reviewing Thomas Pynchon's *Mason & Dixon*, he writes that "Its characters exist to dispense lessons, ideological or philosophical. Although they have a certain alluring liveliness, they do not quite exist as people." Of Don DeLillo's *Underworld*, he writes that "the paranoid vision incorporates a certain restless despair that makes the creation of rounded individual characters impossible." And of Toni Morrison's *Paradise*, he writes that she "is so besotted with making poetry, with the lyrical dyeing of every moment, that she cannot grant characters their own words.... Morrison loves her own language more than she loves her characters." Wood is an advocate of literary realism, but his idea of realism is wide enough to embrace Kafka and Gogol—because however fantastic the worlds they place their characters in, the characters themselves are imagined with a frightening vividness. Gregor Samsa, antennae and all, is indelibly real. In an essay on Iris Murdoch, Wood refers to her belief that "we judge the great novelists by the quality of their awareness of others... for the novelist this is at the highest level the most crucial test." His discussion of Murdoch is nuanced, and I'm not sure he explicitly endorses her formulation, but I think that a similar view is at the heart of his notion of what good fiction should be.

In one of his best essays, "Half-Against Flaubert," which is included in his collection *The Broken Estate* (2000), Wood contrasts Flaubert with Chekhov in a way that underlines the values he prizes in fiction: "If Flaubert disliked his characters from afar, Chekhov loved his closely; if Flaubert's people are all mistakes, Chekhov's, even the fools, are always forgiven; if Flaubert turned style into a monkish fetish, Chekhov made of it a worldly devotion." Beneath the demanding intellectuality of his essays lies a foundation of old-fashioned humanism.

Wood has his flaws as a critic. The most glaring one is that he rarely lets a work of fiction breathe. When some critics approach a work of literature, they spend a few paragraphs or a few pages getting the lay of the land, trying to meet the work on its own terms—Edmund Wilson comes to mind as a critic who excelled at this. Wood, by contrast, usually declares his verdict within a sentence or two, and spends the rest of the review making his case. He rarely writes a sentence that doesn't have a judgment in it; sometimes it feels as if he reads with his teeth clenched. This isn't a problem when one is reading him in a magazine, but when his essays are collected in a book, his relentlessly polemical style can seem airless. The writer whom Wood resembles most in this respect is F.R. Leavis, the formidable English critic who wrote *The Great Tradition* and founded the journal *Scrutiny*. But Wood is finally better than Leavis. Leavis was all too happy to let his prejudices and irritations substitute for a detailed engagement with the work at hand; Wood, even at his most prosecutorial, clearly gives each case a great deal of thought.

A second flaw, though one he indulges in only intermittently, is that although he's fair to the books he reviews—fair, for example, in the sense that when he criticizes a writer's prose style, he quotes generously from the writer's work, enabling readers to test his judgments against their own—he allows himself many little unfairnesses along the way. In the essay on Saul Bellow mentioned above, Wood sneered, in passing, at Stanley Elkin, Richard Ford, Joyce Carol Oates, Robert Stone, Brian Moore, Norman Mailer, Cormac McCarthy, Gore Vidal and William Gass. Henry James once wrote an essay in which he mentioned an English critical journal that "disposed of a famous writer by saying, in a parenthesis, that he had done nothing but write nonsense all his life"; James went on to commend Matthew Arnold for never "passing judgment in parenthesis." Wood seems to be comfortable dismissing a writer's life's work in parenthesis. These little spasms of meanness are unworthy of him.

Brian Morton's most recent novel is Starting Out in the Evening *(Berkley). His new novel,* A Window Across the River, *will be published by Harcourt in the fall.*

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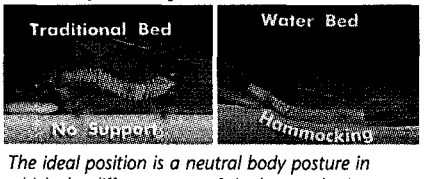

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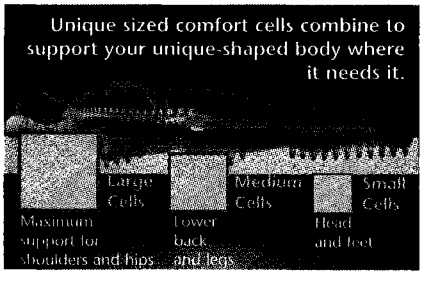
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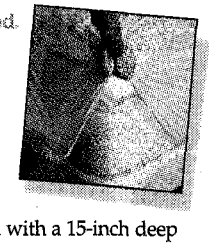

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Wood has now published a novel, *The Book Against God*. The title might lead one to assume that it's an audacious novel; one imagines Wood throwing down the gauntlet in front of all other novelists, living or dead. For better or for worse, the book turns out to be more companionable than that—homier, less grand.

Thomas Bunting, its protagonist, is the British equivalent of a schlemiel. In his early 30s, he has been working for seven years on his PhD thesis in philosophy, which is nowhere near completion. In recent months he has neglected it entirely, having turned instead to a project that he calls his "Book Against God," a critique of religion consisting mainly of quotations and scraps of philosophical argument. Formerly a part-time instructor on the fringes of the academic world, Bunting now keeps himself together through odd jobs and unemployment insurance. He is married, but his wife, Jane, has recently left him. He is a habitual liar, and Jane has told him that she won't take him back until he has proved to her that he has turned himself into an honest man.

The book is constructed on the thinnest scaffolding of plot. The conceit of the novel is that Bunting is writing a sort of private memoir in the months after the death of his father and the departure of his wife. The pages we read represent Bunting's attempt to understand his own life.

The Book Against God is a rather elusive novel. Bunting is an enjoyable character, but it isn't clear what Wood wants us to make of him. His struggles with questions of faith seem genuine enough: "I don't believe that a God exists who created the world we live in…a place of horror and pain," he says. "Either God doesn't exist, or if He exists He is not a creator worthy of worship, love, or even comprehension." His reasons for rejecting religious faith, in fact, overlap with the reasons Wood gives for his own rejection of religion in the title essay of *The Broken Estate*. Yet Bunting seems intellectually cramped, as Wood himself is not. Wood, by his own account, clearsightedly thought his way out of religion while he was still in his teens, while Bunting remains trapped within his quarrel with religion, paralyzed. Of course, a novelist has no obligation to make his characters as formidable as he is, but I fail to understand what the novel gained from the nervous, defensive quality of Bunting's thought. (If Bunting were purely a comic character, none of this would be a problem, but if I'm reading the book correctly, Wood wants him to be more than that.)

In his day-to-day life, Bunting is a buffoon—telling lies both petty and large, giving a humiliatingly self-regarding and rambling talk at his father's funeral and, during his marriage, sneakily taking advantage of his wife's generosity. (He would sit at home pretending to push ahead with his thesis while Jane, a gifted pianist, supported them both by working as a teacher, putting in such long hours that she had no time left to practice her art.) The only large thing about Bunting is his faculty of self-deception. Seeking to account for the breakdown of his marriage, he concludes that his unfinished PhD thesis "is clearly to blame. It forced me into an unnatural and weak position with my wife. Her husband had no income, no power, and no status. All he did was sit at home trying to finish the unfinishable. The more I look at it, the more I see the Ph.D. as the reason for everything bad in my life."

James Wood, the critic, is one of the few living masters of his craft. James Wood, the novelist, is a talented beginner.

It would be absurd to criticize Wood for not being Dostoyevsky, yet in reading *The Book Against God* one can't help contrasting Thomas Bunting with one of his literary forebears, the most formidable God-denier in the history of the novel, Ivan Karamazov. Karamazov's war against God was attended by epic nightmares (a visit from the Devil, a vision of an encounter between Christ and the Grand Inquisitor) and by the highest of stakes (Smerdyakov, Ivan's self-appointed disciple, carries Ivan's revolt against conventional morality to a grotesque destination by committing murder). There are no nightmares, no visions in *The Book Against God*. And, as far as I could see, there are no high stakes. Although the future of Bunting's marriage is in doubt, Bunting is such a childish husband that we're not sure whether to hope that he and Jane get back together or to hope, for Jane's sake, that they don't. And in any case it isn't his atheism that drove Jane away but his dishonesty. (Bunting makes an attempt to connect the two, but it isn't very persuasive, and the novel doesn't pursue it very far.)

The main source of narrative tension in the book is the friction between Bunting, with his intellectual, bitter, tormented disbelief, and his father, Peter, a village priest with a small parish, a man with a cheerful, tolerant and easygoing religious faith. Wood draws the contrast between the two men artfully, but here too it's hard to see what's at stake. Their difference of opinion only fitfully flares up into anything resembling an argument, mainly because Thomas has spent most of his life laboring to conceal his disbelief from his father. And Peter is represented as so tolerant and good-humored that it's hard to believe that their disagreement, even if it had come fully into the open, would have resulted in anything more than a momentary rift. To this reader, it seems as if there's more at stake in Wood's essays, which feel as if they needed to be written, than there is in this novel.

If Bunting has a true literary forebear, it might be Tommy Wilhelm, the evasive and ineffectual protagonist of Saul Bellow's *Seize the Day*. But the differences may be more significant than the similarities. Bellow wrote about Wilhelm from the outside, in a third-person narrative, so that he was able to bring all his astounding rhetorical powers to bear in the telling of Wilhelm's story. Wood writes about Bunting from the inside, in the first person, so that although we admire the performance, we're rarely transported by the narrator's perceptions or his prose. And Wilhelm, as petty and befogged as he is, is granted a revelation at the end of *Seize the Day*, in the form of a moment of fellow feeling that overwhelms the dams of his ego. The climax of *Seize the Day*—in which Wilhelm wanders into a funeral parlor and finds himself weeping for a stranger—can be criticized as forced, willed, imposed on the story rather than springing from it organically, but it is a climax. I couldn't find anything comparable in *The Book Against God*.

In giving my account of the book, I've slighted its many pleasures. The novel's prose is pungent, witty and precise. Wood's criticism is occasionally marred by a weakness for "fine phrases" that don't quite mean anything; there's none of this in *The Book Against God*. Peter is a memorable and attractive character. He seems a more thoughtful descendant of one of Tolstoy's peasants, a man who can't prove the existence of God through argument but whose life itself constitutes the strongest argument one can imagine. Jane is also vividly drawn (although, in his descriptions of her, Wood perhaps asks her ponytail to do too much work). Most important of all, Bunting himself feels authentic: He's funny, pathetic and exas-

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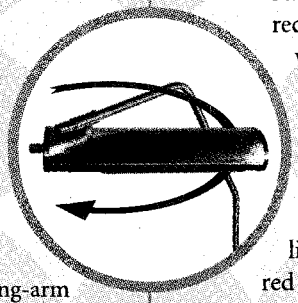

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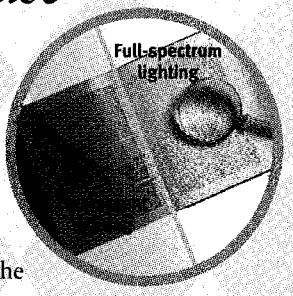

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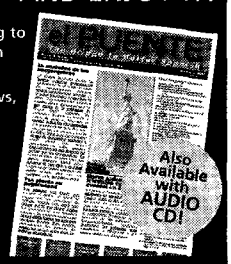

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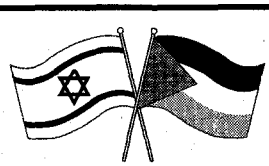

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perating, and his unfitness for daily life, his inability to master the ways of the world enough to find a comfortable place in it, come to seem like an endearing, cockeyed form of integrity. He's a fully imagined character, and in that sense Wood has passed his own test. He has submerged himself entirely in this character, in this story. Wood never lets down his Thomas Bunting mask to reveal his own face, never invites his readers to mark the contrast between the confused character and his brilliant creator.

The most refreshing thing about *The Book Against God* may be its unpretentiousness. In the past ten years or so, many prominent writers have put out six- or seven-hundred-page novels not because they have 600 or 700 pages' worth of anything to say, but because the writing of this kind of hernia-inducing tome has become a required career move, an obligatory gesture of literary machismo. *The Book Against God* isn't one of these strained affairs. It doesn't feel like a career move; it feels like a novel.

The Book Against God is not a masterful novel. Does its modesty point to some flaw at the heart of Wood's criticism? I don't think so. The work of a great critic is not invalidated by the shortcomings of his own creative efforts. The art critic Meyer Schapiro was also a painter—a painter of no great significance, but this doesn't diminish the interest of his essay on Cézanne's apples. Edmund Wilson's *I Thought of Daisy* is a forgettable novel; Wilson's studies of Dickens, Joyce and Hemingway remain unforgettable. We read Norman Mailer's articles on boxing with fascination, without imagining that he could have stepped into the ring and knocked out Muhammad Ali.

James Wood, the critic, is one of the few living practitioners of his craft who will be read fifty years from now. James Wood, the novelist, is a talented beginner. My hope about his future novels is that while retaining the playful spirit that animates this one, he will allow the full blazing light of his mind to be more fully in evidence. In this novel, Wood stoops to fit inside his harried and self-deluding protagonist. At the same time as I admired the performance, I would love to see Wood standing up straight, and giving us characters who are as large and many-sided—and as brilliant—as he is. ■

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Carol Muske-Dukes

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Bob Hope, Prisoner of War

FRANCIS DAVIS

War correspondents frequently suffer from what might be diagnosed as Ernie Pyle Syndrome. At least one colleague of the late Michael Kelly, the *Washington Post* columnist and former editor of *The Atlantic Monthly*, who was killed while traveling with the Third Infantry Division in Iraq, confessed to being angry with Kelly on hearing of his death. The colleague had argued that having written brilliantly about the first Gulf War entitled Kelly to sit this one out, especially since he was now the father of two young children. Bob Hope was a showman, not a reporter, but until old age stopped him, he obeyed the same urge. Not bending the truth by much in *Don't Shoot, It's Only Me*—one of his numerous memoirs, published in 1990—Hope quipped that the closest the United States came to formally declaring war on North Vietnam was in 1963, when he was invited over to perform for our military, as he had during World War II and Korea.

The recipient of both a Jean Hersholt Humanitarian Award from the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences *and* a Congressional Medal of Honor (and probably the only US civilian ever targeted for assassination by the Vietcong), Hope donned camouflage and entertained US troops on foreign soil as recently as Desert Storm. But to our men and women in Bosnia in 1996, he merely sent a video and his prayers. Iraq was out of the question for Hope, who celebrated his hundredth birthday on May 29; the old casting-couch general no longer had the strength to appear on his own television specials, much less escort a harem of beauty queens and Sinatra discards into war zones. So on April 20, with the fighting in Iraq more or less over, though not the homefront flagwaving (nor the Pentagon and the newsmedia's exploitation of our rescued POWs—an invasion of their privacy unanticipated by the Geneva Conventions), NBC presented a two-hour retrospective called *100 Years of Hope and Humor*, thirty minutes of which consisted of clips from Hope's 1940s USO tours and his 1960s Vietnam Christmas specials.

The special was watched by 12.6 million people—nothing compared with the numbers that Hope racked up in the age before cable, but enough to dominate its time slot and finish in Nielsen's Top 20 for the week. I have a hunch that these ratings surprised NBC, given that (along with patriotic fever) the logic in jumping the gun on Hope's centenary by several weeks seemed to be to avoid showing chicken skin and black-and-white archival footage during a sweeps month, when advertising rates are set and the only viewers who count are loutish young men between the ages of 18 and 35.

The ratings surprised me, even though I wouldn't have dreamed of missing the show. I have a soft spot for Bob Hope dating back to my childhood in the 1950s, when I saw him in *That Certain Feeling*, *Beau James* and *The Seven Little Foys*—movies in which he was so funny and appealing it hardly mattered that he epitomized an era of popular culture being pushed aside by mine. But I don't think I know anybody else who watched the Easter-night special, which tells you something about the company I keep. I know plenty of people who loathe Hope, on general principle, as a hideous relic of a time when young actresses were referred to as "sex kittens" and war was embraced as a masculine rite of passage, a team sport with fatalities.

These people tend to be my age and older; no one under 40 seems to think much about Hope one way or the other, which might be the greater insult. "To most of my friends, Bob Hope is the guy in the blazer who's doing a monologue off cue cards or who's dressed as a Cabbage Patch doll and doing a sketch with Brooke Shields," Conan O'Brien, the host of NBC's *Late Night* and a former writer for *The Simpsons* and *Saturday Night Live*, told the *New York Times* in 1998, describing the decrepit Hope his generation grew up with in the 1970s. "If you were a comedy fan, you knew that he was one of the faces on Mount Rushmore, but you thought it was based on that. It wasn't."

O'Brien recommended taking a look at Hope's movies of the 1940s and early '50s—good advice, because there was a difference between this Hope and the later one

Francis Davis, a contributing editor of The Atlantic Monthly, *is the author of* Afterglow: A Last Conversation With Pauline Kael *(DaCapo).*

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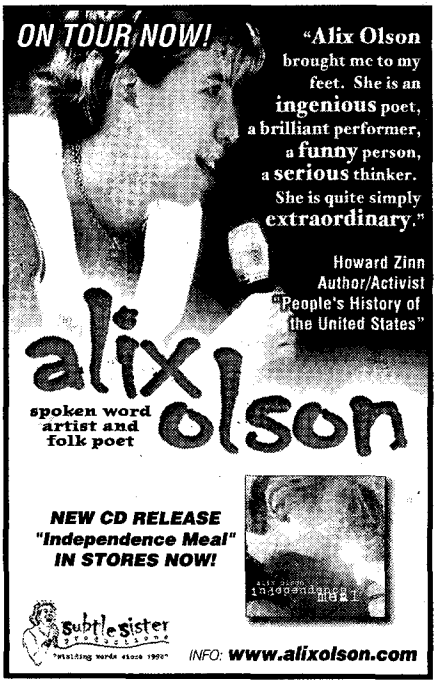
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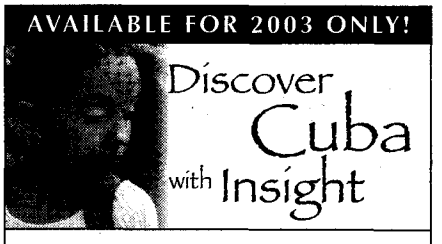
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from television. In his prime, the smug TV stand-up had no equal at working an audience or milking a laugh; he was the CEO of comedy, with his own celebrity golf classic included among the perks. The character that Hope played to perfection in movie after movie was something else altogether—the weasel who got by on his wits, but just barely. He was a boastful coward who was the only one ever fooled by his bravado, a loser who could be manipulated by anybody clever enough to pretend that he wasn't, a wolf who came on to every pretty girl he met and kept coming on after being rebuffed, as if seduction were a war of attrition.

Of course, W.C. Fields was all of these things a good decade earlier than Hope. But Hope added something new, something I think James Agee unwittingly put his finger on when he complained (in a 1949 piece he wrote for *Life* in praise of the great silent-movie comedians) that most of the humor in Hope's movies was verbal. This wasn't completely true; part of what made Hope a terrific comic actor, as opposed to a radio gagman hauled in front of a camera, was his face—I mean his double takes, of course, which were almost a match for Jack Benny's, but also the inspired way he put his very features to work for him. His chin stuck out so far, for example, that he might as well have been leading with it, just begging for a punch, as he backpedaled away from an assailant just itching to land one (he'd been a prizefighter as a young man, and he still had the moves).

Still, Agee had a point. Hope never stopped talking, even when running from a punch or holding a lover in his arms, and if frequently nobody on screen seemed to be paying attention to anything he said, that was all right because his funniest remarks were aimed straight at the balcony anyway (many of his best vehicles, including *The Paleface*, *My Favorite Brunette*, and his borderline-surreal "Road" pictures with Bing Crosby, were genre parodies that depended on the supporting cast playing it straight). Modeling his delivery on Walter Winchell's hard-boiled rat-tat-tat (itself a modification of Hemingway's tough guy), Hope was perhaps the first star of vaudeville and Broadway to comprehend the different requirements of radio and what many people still referred to as "talking pictures" when he made his screen debut in *The Big Broadcast of 1938*, stealing the show right out from under Fields's bulbous nose.

The Big Broadcast, one of seventeen films included in *The Bob Hope DVD Tribute Collection*, a series of DVDs released by Universal to coincide with Hope's landmark birthday, was also the movie in which Hope and Shirley Ross, playing a wised-up divorced couple who are still half in love with each other, sang "Thanks for the Memory." As much as anything else, it was Hope's singing in this scene that made him a star, yet anyone seeing the movie for the first time is likely to be surprised by what a wonderful singer he was. Before going to Hollywood, Hope introduced a number of immortal songs on Broadway, beginning with Vernon Duke and Ira Gershwin's "I Can't Get Started" in the Ziegfield Follies of 1936. What virtually ended his singing career was being cast opposite Crosby, who was only the most popular recording artist of the first half of the twentieth century. Because it was understood that Crosby would get the girl, the "Road" movies also desexualized Hope. Although he occasionally joined Crosby for a comic duet, the formula called for Crosby to do the romantic ballads it took to woo Dorothy Lamour. Crosby more or less invented a sensational style of pop singing in the 1920s, but by the time he teamed up with Hope, he'd become a crooning self-caricature. Unlike Lamour, I happen to prefer Hope's looser, more conversational phrasing; and before calling me crazy, you need to hear his four duets with Ross on *Thanks for the Memories*, a compilation on MCA that will force you to think twice.

Hope's influence has been ubiquitous, both as a stand-up comedian and as a comic actor. Without him as the prototype, there would be no Johnny Carson, Steve Martin or Bill Murray—to say nothing of Maxwell Smart, Austin Powers, George Costanza, Deputy Sheriff Barney Fife and even *M*A*S*H*'s Capt. Benjamin Franklin "Hawkeye" Pierce, an idealist-become-cynic whose nonstop wisecracking outweighed the fact that he was Hope's antithesis in every other way (many of his quips were the work of Larry Gelbart, the creator of the series, who did his own tour of duty in Korea as Hope's head writer). Conan O'Brien, when announcing that his guests that night include a supermodel or leggy movie star, might lick his index fingers and use them to smooth his eyebrows, like Hope primping for what he's only been led to believe will be a romantic rendezvous (it's usually some sort of scheme, with him as the sucker). The host of *Late Night* also occasionally growls when an attractive female guest says something provocative, a variation on Hope's ejaculatory *woof!* And the premise of many of O'Brien's best sketches is either that he's sexually inadequate or that nobody thinks he's funny—two more pages straight out of Hope's book,

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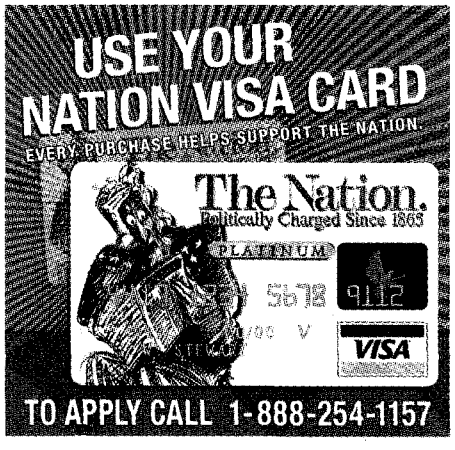
as O'Brien would be the first to admit.

Hope's other most adoring fan among fellow professionals is Woody Allen, who once admitted that "it's everything I can do at times not to imitate him," and has himself frequently been accused of being overly verbal in his approach to comedy. "It's hard to tell when I do," Allen said in 1973 while filming *Sleeper*, "because I'm so unlike him physically and in tone of voice, but once you know I do it, it's absolutely unmistakable." (Forget that Hope is funny-haha, and Allen often funny-weird. The real difference between them is that Allen, in his movies, is usually desperate for our approval, whereas Hope dared us to dislike him, confident that he was irresistible.) Allen has more or less credited Hope with inventing the one-liner, which I think is going a little too far. What Hope does seem to have originated, for better or worse, is the celebrity in-joke, a type of humor that assumes the audience is familiar with the foibles of the stars. (It resembles ethnic humor in presupposing such knowledge, but hasn't celebrity become a type of ethnicity? Many show business elders adored Ronald Reagan when he was President not because they agreed with his policies but because he was one of theirs.) Jokes about the famous flatter the rest of us, in making us feel like members of the clan. But no other brand of humor has a shorter shelf-life.

A telling moment on the NBC special came during a clip from an unspecified military base in Southeast Asia, circa 1965. It's Christmas, and Hope badgers a soldier into singing "Silent Night" with Les Brown's orchestra. The soldier sings surprisingly well; he has good pitch and a pleasing baritone, and despite the stiffness in his body, he doesn't rush the beat. Giving in to the moment, he lifts the microphone off its stand and brings it close to his mouth, like a pop crooner. "I tell ya, that Bing has children everywhere," Hope wisecracks. Cut to the soldier, now a lot older, who tells us that everybody laughed, including him. If so, weren't they just going along with the implied script? We now know that our soldiers were as radicalized by the sixties as the college protesters. By the end of the war, they were booing Hope. What possible sense did they make of a *Hollywood Canteen*–era joke about—what exactly? Crosby's Catholic disdain for birth control?

What other comics have always admired about Hope isn't necessarily his material, but his mechanics—the smoothness of his setups and payoffs. My favorite joke of his, in a way, is the one he opened with after being announced as the winner of the Hersholt award: "I don't know what to say," he admitted, seemingly humbled, then waited a beat. "I don't have writers for this kind of work." "Bob Hope is supposed to employ so many gagmen they are organizing a union," the film critic Otis Ferguson once remarked—a joke that only sounds like one written for Hope. The new *Bob Hope: My Life in Jokes*, assembled by his daughter Linda, proves that Hope's humor doesn't really translate to the page. His gift, hardly a small one, was in delivering scripted material as if he were ad-libbing.

In the 1960s, Hope found himself on the wrong side of both a war and a generation gap. How did someone with such unerring timing so misjudge the cultural moment? In *Don't Shoot, It's Only Me*, he sought to give the impression that he went to Vietnam only to show his concern for our troops, not necessarily to endorse our foreign policy—a distinction that no one would argue with today (indeed, that such a distinction needs to be made was among the most painful lessons of Vietnam). But by 1990, even Robert McNamara was claiming to have been a closet peacenik. In the 1960s, when Hope wasn't on stage making sour fun of hippies and draft-card burners, he was giving interviews in which he mouthed the domino principle: "If the Commies ever thought we weren't going to protect the Vietnamese, there would be Vietnams everywhere," he said in 1965. He has more in common with Jane Fonda than either might realize—they both were casualties of Vietnam. She's always going to be "Hanoi Jane" to right-wing talk-show hosts, and the left is never going to forgive him for mistaking Vietnam for Iwo Jima. I say it's time we granted Hope amnesty, not because we owe it to him but because we owe it to ourselves. He never made a movie as good as *Klute* or *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?*, but at least he never made one as sappy as *On Golden Pond* or as heavy-handed as *Coming Home*. ■



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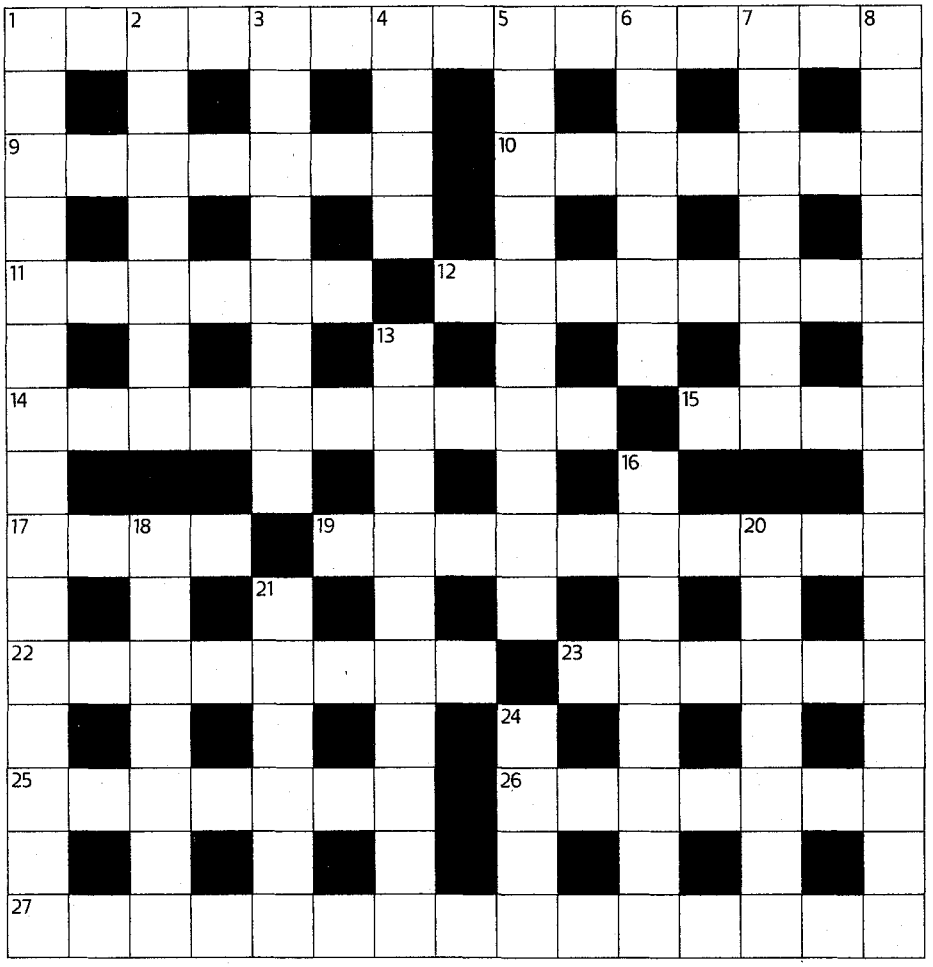

ACROSS

1 What the retroussé gene does, one does to a rotten egg. (5,2,4,4)

9 When you get the last ice cream, you can stretch things out with its contents. (7)

10 Able to have boiled rice inside, in the manner of Homer's enchantress. (7)

11 The sort of "Big Ace" that has lots of cubes might be good for a headache. (3,3)

12 A vacation spot where you may drink something of second-class quality, with a splash of soda. (8)

14 Though in orderly fashion, it's my caste that makes it! (10)

15 One way to catch me, with a command to be quiet. (4)

17 See 4 down

19 Before the fighting starts, what you put in the pot has commonly bad measure in it. (10)

22 Wrecked car with a bulb that still shines on the street. (3,5)

23 Able to make two showings of the dance. (3-3)

25 In Argentina it's a tall order to contain the Associated Press! (2,5)

26 Where the bird has a form of box tier? (7)

27 How unmarried couples stand in rather simple fashion. (7,8)

DOWN

1 It might indicate the coming of spring, or give you a taste of what the drink is like. (3,5,7)

2 Dear to the editor when Reds are upset by it. (7)

3 Though perhaps unexpected, it's a date! And it may be a way to completely fill you up! (8)

4 and **17** across What the traveler may carry on his back to fill something up with wine. (8)

5 Teams have a trace of confusion about what's really pretty peachy! (10)

6 One who writes about something like a baby bed running in two directions? (6)

7 Bill occasionally is late like this, having possibly roved to the capital of Utah and finally got the point. (7)

8 Sea eagles on the China passage, according to the author. (6,9)

13 Never got blonde having it? (Almost impossible to see when the earth turns.) (5,5)

16 Showed the way up, and fully cognizant in this state. (8)

18 One might find it in a fighter, or a fighter in it. (7)

20 Look at the automobile! It has no place to go if you like Switzerland! (7)

21 Alternately, the town of Titipu—or the boss of its country. (6)

24 He's a bad or a good player, depending on how you look at it. (4)

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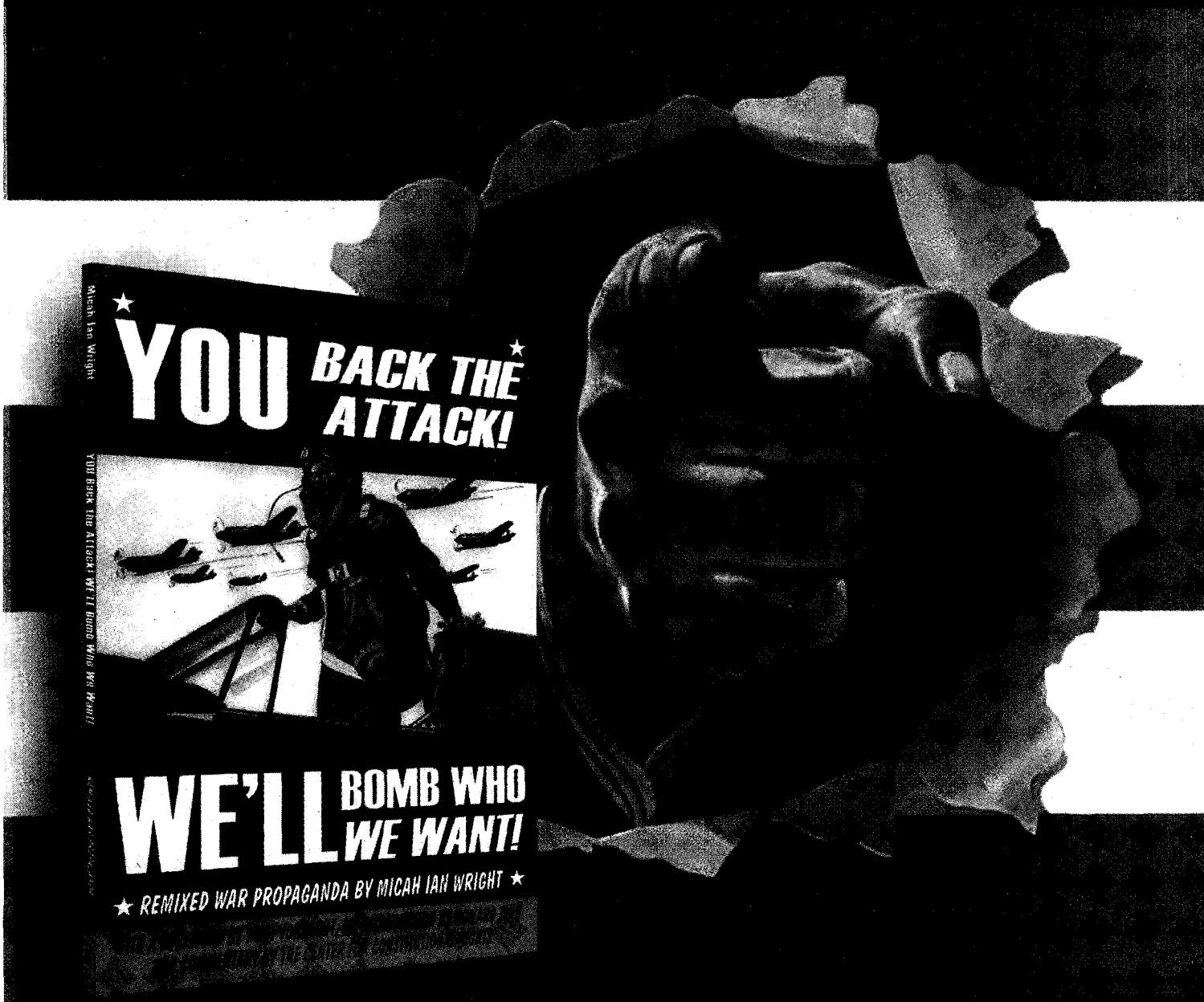

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